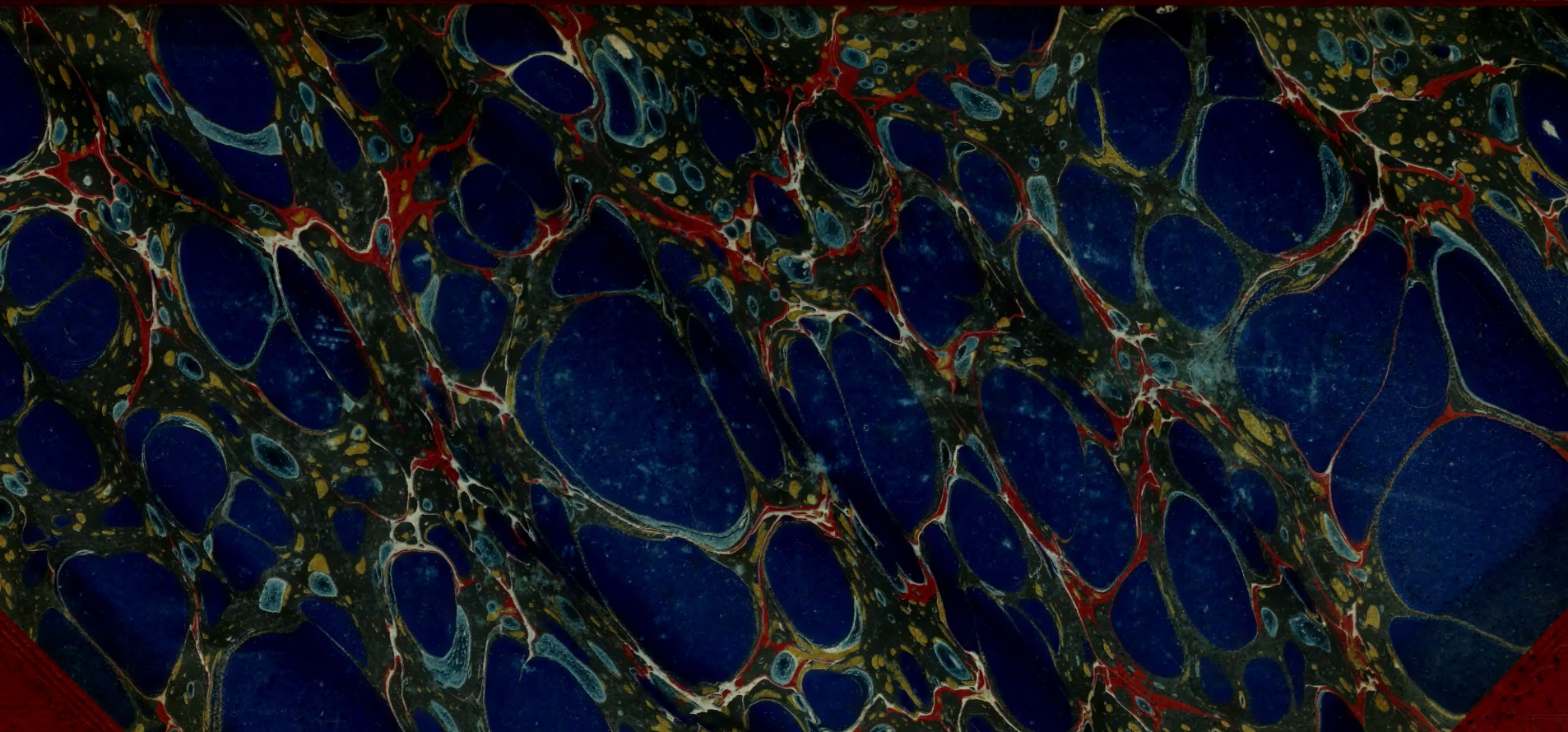
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ROBERT BARNES. R. AND E. TAYLOR

THE TWO OLD LADIES EXCLAIMED THEIR DELIGHT AT SEEING HIM.

"Laden with Golden Grain."

THE

ARGOSY.

EDITED BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD.

VOLUME XXXIV.

July to December, 1882.

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oo Late. By ISABELLA FYVIE MAYO . . . . . .

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By ROBERT BARNES.

The two old ladies exclaimed their delight.
The Blue-rimmed Jar.
What did the Vicar see?
There was an exclamation of surprise.
Evelyn sat down in silence.

THE ARGOSY.

JULY, 1882.

MRS. RAVEN'S TEMPTATION.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PERPLEXITY.

THE cry of distress, sharp and piercing, resounding at midnight through the peaceable house of the Reverend Mr. Connell, startled its inmates to terror. In a minute all was confusion. There were sounds of shoeless feet running hurriedly across bed-rooms, of doors opening, of vague questions, addressed apparently to the air.

Mrs. Connell, being up and dressed, came forth from Miss Cleare's room at once. Alice followed her, pale and uncertain. The minister, hardly awake yet and very much alarmed, was coming out of his chamber, settling himself into his old grey dressing-gown. Evelyn Agate appeared in a white wrapper. Mrs. Raven came behind with a white face. The two maid-servants stood on the attic stairs, quaking and quivering.

"Where is Mrs. Connell?" called out the minister, in alarm. "What cry is that?"

"I am here, James," she answered. "I have been sitting all the while with Miss Cleare, never thinking how late it was. Who was it that shrieked? What is the matter? What did they see?"

"See!" cried Mr. Connell, thinking the word a curious one to use. "Is everybody here?"

"Where is Louisa?" exclaimed the mother, missing her daughter and hastily moving towards the door of her chamber. But Louisa's voice was instantly heard in reply. "I am coming out as fast as I can, mamma. What is the matter?"

A similar question, with divers sounds of hasty movements, and somewhat stormy exclamations, came from the little room, which, in the crowded state of the house, Philip and Percy were occupying together. In almost less than a moment, they were on the scene. And then Frank appeared, looking not fully awake yet.

"Who screamed? Who shrieked?" were the words in everybody's mouth. Questions easier asked than answered.

"We must go through the house from top to bottom," said Mrs. Connell. She could not keep a certain uneasiness out of her tone.

"There are no burglars in it, I suppose," cried her husband, hastily. "Did you hear anything—save the cry, Milicent?"

"Nothing but the cry," she replied.

"And what did you suppose there was for anybody to *see?*" pursued the minister.

"Better go through the house," she answered. "Lose no time. Any of you not well wrapped up must get a shawl," added the careful mother.

Philip turned into his room and brought out a box of matches, with which he re-lit the gas at every burner they passed. "Let us have plenty of light on the subject, at any rate," said he.

Everything in the drawing-room lay exactly as they had left it an hour before, but the apartment had the strange ghastliness and chill common to familiar places unexpectedly entered at midnight.

"Are the outer doors fast?" asked Mrs. Connell. And Philip and Percy went together to ascertain, while she herself lifted aside the curtains and tried the bolts of the windows: which were quite secure. Half-instinctively she threw the curtains wide, as if she did not want to see more of the garden than the rest could. There it lay, empty and yellow in the moonlight. "Do you see anyone loitering there?" she asked.

"Hardly likely, mother," spoke Philip, who had just got back from looking to the doors.

"Well, Philip, somebody was in the garden at the time of the scream—or the moment before it," answered his mother.

"Eh, what's that?" cried the minister. "Somebody in the garden?"

"Midnight owls who had stolen in to have a peep at the trees," lightly suggested Philip, attaching no importance to what his mother had said.

"And the scream was within the house, I am quite sure," cried Louisa.

"Stay a bit—how you children talk!" reproved their father. "The scream was in the house, that is certain. The question is, did any one of you scream?"—looking round generally.

But Mr. Connell got no assenting answer. "Well, then," he rejoined, "if it was none of us that screamed, some one must be in the house that we know nothing of."

"Were any of you awake—besides myself and Miss Cleare?" asked Mrs. Connell, glancing around at the group. "Were you, Mrs. Raven?" she quickly continued, seeing what had escaped her notice before, that her sister-in-law had appeared in unruffled order, in the same secure black robe of rich silk and crape which she had worn during the evening.

"I was quite awake," replied Mrs. Raven. "I had sat up

writing a letter to Leonard. The house was quite still, and I had no idea anybody in it was up but myself."

Mrs. Raven spoke calmly, but her face was ghastly pale, and her hands were visibly trembling.

"That shriek must have startled you terribly, I fear," said Mrs. Connell, her kind heart melting towards her sister-in-law as she thought of the lonely widow, sitting up at midnight, writing to her son.

"Yes, it did. I—what is that?"

The little party started simultaneously, and drew nearer to one another. Some stealthy movement was taking place in the hall. It proved to be the frightened servants.

"Come in, come in," called out their master. "It was not either of you who screamed, I suppose?"

"Law, sir, no," said the cook, "'twasn't neither of us—why my heart's in my mouth yet, sir. It was just a yell, sir."

"Three screams, one fast upon the other," gasped the housemaid. "The last one was more like the other two dying away, sir."

"We are losing time," said Philip. "We had better go through the house. Not you, father; you stay here—to protect the ladies, you know," he added, half laughing. "Come along, Frank."

Percy followed them, and they began their search systematically, looking not only into rooms and closets and cupboards, but into coal-boxes and warming pans. Philip was making a half joke of it.

"We shan't find anybody, Frank," said he, confidentially.

"I hardly know what it is we are looking for," Frank answered. "Midnight robbers don't scream to betray their presence. I take it for granted there was a scream—and a pretty shrill one: but it could not come from them."

Philip turned to look at him. "Did you not hear it?" he asked.

"I heard you all running about and crying out; that was what awakened me: I heard nothing more. Of course I knew something must be wrong. At first I thought the house was on fire."

"It was a mighty squeal," said Percy. "You must be a sound sleeper, Frank."

"Yes, a squeal—a scream—a shriek—a yell—three yells," nodded Philip. "We shan't find anything, Frank, I tell you; but we must look everywhere, all the same."

"That of course. What was the shriek?" debated Frank. "Who made it? One of the ladies, I shouldn't wonder." And Philip nodded emphatically.

"We are not going to have any mysterious story hanging about this house," said the young barrister. "It was an investment of my father's; and you know, as Miss Agate says, tragedy isn't good for house property. Ten years hence, if we wanted to sell it, this story of a dreadful shriek at midnight, that could not be accounted for might rise up and lessen its value. We must sift it out, Frank."

"But if it can't be sifted?" debated Frank.

"It can. Don't tell me. A thing like that happening in a well-ordered house must have an explanation—if you can only get at it. Perhaps one of the two girls dreamt she saw the 'Oriental Mystery,' and shrieked out in fright.—And here we are at the end of our search; this is the last room—housemaid's pantry, I believe they call it—and nothing has been found."

The party in the drawing-room, who had been straining their ears to follow the sound of the young men's footsteps, going to and fro and up and down, received them back with a faint feeling of disappointment. Non-success did not bring re-assurance. As long as the cause of the shriek remained unknown, the shriek might be heard again.

"Have you searched thoroughly?" began the minister.

"Thoroughly," replied his son Philip; "from garret to basement. There's not a yard of space that we've not looked into. I can answer for it, father, that no person whatever is in the house but ourselves."

Knowing that nobody would care to go to bed until the excitement should in a degree have passed off and the matter been talked over, Mrs. Connell suggested they should all have some coffee, and the two servants were sent into the kitchen to blow up the fire and boil the kettle.

"That's mother all over, taking care of us all," laughed Philip. "If a ghost came in sight, mother could only order it a hot bath, lest it should have taken cold in its night wanderings."

"Be serious, you young people," said their father; "you would like to turn everything into ridicule. This matter must be cleared up, if it can be. What was that you said, Milicent, about seeing somebody in the garden?"

"I had been talking with Miss Cleare, and letting the time run on unheeded, as I told you," replied Mrs. Connell. "When the clock struck twelve, I started up, saying I did not know what you would think had become of me. Miss Cleare opened the window curtains; she exclaimed what a lovely night it was, and I stood by her side for a minute, looking out. All at once, we both saw the figure of a man, coming across the lawn from the shrubs by the railings. He appeared to be making straight for the house. Suddenly he seemed to look up—not, I think, at our window, though I can't be sure—halt for the briefest possible moment, turn back and disappear amidst the shrubs. And before he was quite out of sight we heard that startling scream."

"Well now, mother, what was the man like?" asked Philip. "Was it anyone you knew? Should you recognise him again?"

"No," replied Mrs. Connell, "it was not anyone I knew. I might recognise the figure again, and probably should: but in calling it a man, Philip, I speak from supposition only that it was one. It was enveloped in some covering, a dark cloak I think, from head to foot."

Frank lifted his head. "Why," he exclaimed, "that is just the

description Miss Cleare gave of the figure she saw that night in the Raven lanes!"

"And Miss Cleare thinks this is the same figure she saw then."

Mrs. Connell's words fell upon the room as an electric shock. Mrs. Raven, sitting apart, pale and silent, lifted her face with a start, and dropped it again.

Philip was the first to find tongue. "*No!*" he exclaimed.

"Yes, yes, Philip," said his mother. "Miss Cleare recognised the figure with a start; I could feel that, as she caught hold of me. It was the same figure which had frightened her in the Ravenstoke lanes, she whispered. The evening she met you, you know, Frank. You were talking of it in the drawing-room to-night."

Louisa caught sight of her aunt's face; and it startled her. "Dear Mrs. Raven! how pale you are! Ought you to sit up to be troubled by all this? Shall I go with you to your room?"

Louisa's words recalled Evelyn Agate to the duties of her own place. She sprang up and approached her mistress.

But Mrs. Raven put them all aside. She was usually pale, she said, with a would-be careless smile; she thought they had all been a little startled. But certainly she would not go to her room. She was far too much interested: and she believed most people liked mysteries. And so Evelyn slipped down on the footstool beside her, and sat there, holding her hand. With her white robe relieved against Mrs. Raven's sombre gown, and Frank leaning on the back of his mother's chair, the group would have made a pretty tableau. Evelyn was aware of this. She was sure to be aware of a pretty tableau in which she played a striking part.

"Well," said Philip, "how did you recognise this figure, Miss Cleare?"

"Only by the cloak and hat," she answered. "On neither occasion have I seen anything of the face, except its whiteness. In the moonlight it looked like that of the dead. But it had a strange red mark at the side. I can't say what it is, exactly."

"I thought no face was to be seen!" exclaimed Philip.

"Yes, just a glimpse of it both times; its colour, not its features. I have never seen anything as white in my life as it looked each time in the full moonlight. It was raised for a moment to-night, just as the figure turned: and then it held out its right hand clutched, and shook it with a threatening gesture."

"And, before the figure disappeared, you and my mother heard the scream. Did you think that scream came from a man's voice or a woman's?"

"I could not tell," replied Alice.

"Nor I," said Mrs. Connell. "It only seemed a cry of awful pain."

"Of terror and despair; as it seemed to me," observed Alice Cleare, gently. "I am not sure but at the moment I caught up

the impression that it must be a woman's voice. A man's would hardly have been so shrill."

"I have known men's voices grow shrill in terror," remarked Philip. "Aunt Raven, what did it seem like to you?"

"It was just a cry," she answered, coughing slightly. "I got no impression concerning it."

"It was like the yell of the banshees we read about in Irish story books," said Louisa. Her brother looked at her; knowing about the events of yesterday, he understood why supernatural imagery came up so readily.

"It was like somebody being murdered," said Evelyn.

"I am like Mrs. Raven," observed the minister. "I was aware only of a sudden cry ringing through my doze. The question is—whether anyone, sleeping front, saw this figure on the grass, felt alarmed at it, and so gave the scream. I suppose you are sure it was neither you nor Miss Cleare?"—to his wife.

"That it was not, James. I wish I could say it had been."

"Well—who else of us occupies front rooms?"

"Mrs. Raven; Louisa; Miss Agate; Philip and Percy."

"And now, who amongst you looked out to see this figure?" demanded Mr. Connell. No one spoke.

"You sat at the table in the middle of the room, writing your letter—with the curtains drawn," said Mrs. Connell, turning to Mrs. Raven: who nodded in reply.

"I was in bed," put in Louisa.

"So was I," added Evelyn.

"And I'm sure we were," said Percy, "and fast asleep, too."

"Ah, I see we shall have to fall back upon mother and Miss Cleare," remarked Philip, not choosing to confess to the baffled feeling that seemed to be setting in. "They do admit to have seen the mysterious visitant, and to have been alarmed at it. Can you be *quite* sure, mother, that the scream was not given by Miss Cleare or yourself? Remember, you were alarmed and off your guard: nothing could be more natural than to cry out."

"I am not a screaming woman," said Mrs. Connell, a little piqued, for she really believed Philip was putting the questions seriously. "And I am sure Miss Cleare is not, either."

"So," remarked Philip, "it seems that we are just where we were. I shall begin to think there was no cry at all. You had all of you gone up to your bed-rooms nervous; that's what it was. As to the figure, we had been talking of that figure, you know. So what more easy than to have imagined you saw it, and to have been alarmed accordingly? Nothing is so deceptive as moonlight."

"There was something to alarm us at any rate," retorted Mrs. Connell. "The man *was* in the garden—for a man I have no doubt it was. Though you seem to wish to take away our ears and our common sense, Philip, I suppose we may keep our eyes."

"Well," admitted Philip, "there's more satisfaction in having to deal with a man than a ghost, so it is well you feel no doubt upon that point, mother. I thought I heard it said to-night—by Frank, was it?—that the figure given to haunt the precincts of Ravenstoke in a dark cloak was supposed to be a ghost, and not a man. Certainly one cannot at present see what the Ravenstoke ghost should want at Coltburn ——"

"Don't joke, Philip, cried Mrs. Raven, in a low, weary voice. "It is not a subject for it."

Philip was checked at once. He begged Mrs. Raven's pardon, and said mentally that he ought to have remembered she was present. "But I wonder," he added to himself, as an afterthought, "what it is in this business that is especially scaring her. She looks as white as the ghost could look; and so she did when they were talking in the drawing-room to-night of the figure that walks in the Raven lanes."

The coffee which had been ordered now came in—perhaps to some of them as a welcome interruption. As Mr. Connell slowly stirred that in his cup round and round to cool it,—for to drink hot tea or coffee always made his voice hoarse—he began turning about in his mind how he could best set about the solving of this mystery.

"We are all naturally incredulous of anybody's seeing or hearing more than we do ourselves," remarked Philip, calmly. "And as the rest of us did not see this phenomenon on the shadowy lawn, only the mother and Miss Cleare—why, there it is."

He was crossing the room as he spoke, after putting down his empty coffee-cup. Mr. Connell pinned him by the arm.

"Philip," he said, in a low, grave tone, "what reason have you for persisting in this semi-satire? Have any of you young men been playing a joke, by giving vent to the cry yourselves?"

"No, father," earnestly spoke Philip, who knew he must not trifle with the minister. "We know absolutely nothing about it, any more than you know. I only thought to throw a less grave face upon it by way of re-assurance."

The coffee had done wonders in the way of renovation, and the whole party was astir now; Mrs. Connell ironically remarking, "I'm sure nobody can be afraid to go to bed, after Philip has set our nerves so entirely at rest."

Miss Cleare was the first to go back to her own room. She said so little, that Philip wondered if she was really vexed; and he noticed his aunt watching her movements with deep interest, and an expression of countenance which he felt had some meaning beyond his understanding.

Mrs. Raven repudiated all suggestions that she might be the better for a companion in her chamber. She did not even seem grateful for the offer, though she did not say she was not frightened, but spoke with a coldness which again recalled past years to Frank's memory. "I own I prefer to be alone."

Louisa and Evelyn decided to pass the rest of the night together. They each felt that after this midnight mystery, it would be a relief to speak with somebody who had shared in the adventures of the preceding day. They went upstairs with Mrs. Raven, assuring her that in their room, next hers, they must hear every sound which could possibly reach her ears, any call she might make.

There was a spice of scorn in the pale smile she turned upon them before she closed her door.

To her, Philip's attempted glib explanation of certain facts, known only to herself, invested those facts with their worst horror.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TWO FORTUNES.

THE two girls slept little that night. Louisa found relief from her over-wrought condition in a rush of confidences, of which Evelyn was chosen to be the recipient, only because she had been the partner—indeed, the originator—of yesterday's exploit. Louisa Connell was not attracted to Evelyn: indeed, she was already beginning to feel a peculiar mistrust of her. But, then, to whom else could she speak? Not to her mother. Not to Miss Cleare. It almost frightened her to feel how this stranger suddenly stood within a circle from which her own familiar, fondly-loved parent, and a girl whose character she had learned implicitly to trust were shut out.

If only she could tell *them* of that clandestine expedition to the Cave! In more than one remark to Evelyn she implied this longing, though something about Evelyn made her shrink from fully expressing it. She felt that Evelyn Agate despised her already, and that she could only despise her more if she knew that she craved to reveal the secret they had agreed to keep.

In reality, Evelyn was by no means averse to its being told. She wanted the witch's message to reach Frank's ears, and if this could not be done without the others hearing, well, then, let them hear! She had boundless faith in her own powers of self-justification and bewitchment; she was sure that she could be very graceful in disgrace. But she was not going to encourage Louisa to make public revelations. Nobody should be able to recollect afterwards that she had stirred one finger towards bringing Frank and this strange Sybil together.

"I do wish I had not gone near that woman," moaned Louisa on her pillow. "This sort of nonsense has an effect upon one's nerves, and some of the things she said to me were depressing."

"If you feel they are nonsense, it is very weak to be troubled by them," replied Evelyn.

"You heard all she said," Louisa went on, "and how she talked

about glory and nations and—— that sort of thing. I don't care one bit about glory, and I don't want to have anything to do with nations! I never even cared much for history. I want a quiet life, and peace and comfort."

"I should have liked a grand, romantic fortune like that," said Evelyn. "All she told me was only what might be expected."

"And yet, if she had followed our looks only," Louisa sighed, "I'm sure she ought to have given you the heroine's part. Whenever we played at charades at school, I was always an old woman in a white cap. The crowns and coronets did not suit my style, and everybody burst out laughing if I put them on."

"But what makes you think of crowns and coronets? "I didn't hear her mention them."

"No," said Louisa, "but you heard her talk about a nation shouting. If it means anything, it means that Marco Learli is somebody more than he seems. He once hinted as much to my mother."

"And has he never put any confidence in you?" asked Evelyn. "Did you not even ask him what he meant by his words to Mrs. Connell?"

Louisa's face was burning in the kindly darkness. "He said to me the first time we met, when we were not sure ever to meet again," she whispered, "that perhaps some day I should see his name in the public papers and hear people talking about him. Those were his words; I never forgot them; for at the time he looked so sad and ill, and his eyes had such a strange, far-away expression, that I was terribly afraid he might be thinking of——of suicide."

Louisa, repeating the last word in a dread, timid whisper, expected Evelyn to be altogether thrilled. But Evelyn laughed.

"That would not have made much sensation," she observed. "It is only what the world might think quite natural in a disappointed, home-sick foreigner. Foreigners do not regard these points as we do. But it is certainly singular when the Italian's modest words get this strange re-statement in a prophetic flourish of the witch-woman's. I wish you joy of your prince in disguise, Miss Connell."

"I don't want him to be a prince in disguise," returned Louisa.

Louisa could not rest. She could not help connecting the visit of yesterday with the terror of this night, and she trembled for what they had done.

"I think we ought to tell Frank Raven about our visit and what was said," she murmured. "You see, Miss Agate, we have begun to mix ourselves up with this woman, and there's nothing so dangerous or foolish in most things as leaving off in the middle. We had better go through to the end, and then be more careful in future."

"Do as you like; you are his cousin; it is for you to tell him," said Evelyn, curtly, craftily suppressing her delight.

"I'll speak to Philip about it again to-morrow," said Louisa, "and hear what he says."

Evelyn gave a smile of disdain. "Were I as sure as you are that it ought to be done, I would not beat about the bush: I would do it," she remarked.

But Louisa said no more. She felt altogether weak and contemptible in comparison with this strong-minded young woman.

So Miss Evelyn Agate got leisure for quiet meditation. The figure in the garden to-night must be certainly identical with the ghost of Ravenscourt that walked in the moonlight,—the ghost of whose baneful influence on the neighbourhood the Ravenstoke stationer had spoken,—the ghost which Alice Cleare and herself had both seen at Ravenstoke, and almost on the same spot. What could be the meaning of its appearance at Coltburn? Had it followed anyone of them? Herself?—or Mrs. Raven?—or Frank?—or even Alice Cleare? Nay, not Alice: that idea was too ridiculous!

Suddenly, all in a moment, Evelyn's heart gave a great leap. Its pulses stood still, and then bounded tumultuously onwards, as a thought which (strange, perhaps, to say) had never struck her before, that her own birthday and Frank's were the same! Could it be that she was the daughter of the house of Ravenscourt?—could it be *possible* that she was Mrs. Raven's child, and that this second son of the family was but a changeling, a stranger and usurper?

But the very fact of her own newly-formed intimate relation with Ravenscourt only made this idea more incredible to Evelyn. For had not those relations been formed in the most conventional manner—formed simply by her own answer to an advertisement in a public print? Evelyn's was not a mind predisposed to believe in providential coincidence.

Yet she harped upon the fancy: that she might be Miss Evelyn Raven. Imagination begun to flutter its wings. The witch must have indicated Frank in the persistent but indifferent lover—surely, yes! And if he became aware of his precarious position, and of how a marriage with her might assure it for ever without pain or scandal, that would both explain and justify a rather loveless suit. It was the course human nature would necessarily take, and she would certainly not blame it. But she did not allow herself to believe that her fancies were facts: she was too practical.

Stay!—There was Marco Learli again; and all the indefinite and wonderful possibilities she saw foreshadowed in *his* future. The desert of her life had suddenly broken up into enchanting prospects. Mirages they might be: but then, again, they might not. And in the meantime, though the horizon had so brightened, the ground remained as solid as ever under her feet, and she must be wary and cautious. For no vague hope of pushing her fortunes, for no wild dream, even of empire, would she risk her present snug resting-place at Ravenscourt.

"A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," mused the girl, as she lay silently, quite unheeding Louisa's ill-suppressed sighs. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

She turned round and composed herself to sleep. Wakefulness destroyed good looks, and confused the brain. She did not feel excited by these imaginings. If Frank were really a changeling, who brought him to the Court, and where did he come from? Somebody must have lost him. Ha!—and she started at the sudden thought—there was the Agates' baby boy! That was lost—or stolen. Could that boy be Frank? Dear, dear! if Aunt Gertrude got a suspicion of all this, how she would work to unfathom the mystery, and not leave a stone unturned! But Aunt Gertrude's suspicions must not be roused. That might only end in unsettling Evelyn's present position, without in the least improving her future. Thus Evelyn's fancy went toying with her own life and the lives and hearts of those who stood nearest her; but she did not find the game too exciting, for she fell asleep in the middle of it.

Next morning, she remembered her own ideas almost as if they had come to her in a dream. She was Mrs. Raven's companion; neither more nor less. But there are some dreams which we do not readily forget.

Of course, the first topic of conversation at the breakfast table was the alarm of the preceding night. The only one of the party who looked any the worse for the disturbance was Mrs. Raven. She owned she had never closed her eyes, but added that sleeplessness was no uncommon condition with her now. There was a fall in her voice, as she said that, which went to Frank's heart.

"Did you notice any people beside yourselves at the Cave yesterday?" suddenly asked Mrs. Connell. "Loose characters do hang about there sometimes."

Louisa's face flushed vividly. But Evelyn's reply was prompt.

"We saw nobody except our own party. At least I did not. Did you?"—and she turned towards the two others.

Louisa bent her head to stir the sugar in her cup. Philip looked Evelyn full in the face.

"Our own party!" he repeated. "I scarcely saw even it at the Cave. There was not room for us all inside together."

"Ah, well," said Mrs. Connell. "There are many hours in a day, and I dare say most people visit that place in the afternoon. Besides, these sensational advertisements often conceal meanings quite different from what appears on their surface."

"Why, mother," exclaimed Philip, "what are you talking of? "What has the Cave to do with sensational advertisements?"

"Only this, Philip: there is such an advertisement in to-day's paper, purporting to have some connection with a yesterday's visitor at the Cave."

"Dear me!" rejoined Philip, feeling rather conscious. "What may that be?"

"Nothing very interesting on the surface of it," answered his mother, "but, as I say, the true meaning may be hidden. Listen:

"'THE CAVE: Yesterday: Is the message delivered? Beware!'"

Louisa was trembling from head to foot. She dared not lift her eyes either to Evelyn's face or Philip's. A buzzing sound rang in her ears; through which she heard Evelyn take up the conversation, in her specially quiet, deliberate manner, and speak to Philip.

"There was that woman who passed us; after we came out of the Cave. She looked like a character—as if she had a history of her own."

Louisa had to control herself during breakfast. Afterwards she drew Philip to what was called the housekeeper's room, a little place that had been her own peculiar sanctum since she took the housekeeping and other domestic duties off her mother's hands. There she gave way completely, and sobbed aloud.

"Philip, I'm frightened to death; I can't bear it any longer. And I won't have that Miss Agate crowing over me, as I know she *is*. And Frank ought to get that message! It is for him to choose his own course afterwards: not for us to keep him in the dark."

Philip was thoughtful. For one thing, he could not understand his sister's panic. He knew Evelyn Agate better than Louisa did, and probably had even a lower and yet truer estimate of her worth, or worthlessness. But Philip was no sage: only a worldly-wise young man, who had his wits about him. He was quite willing that Frank should receive the message that the witch had sent. In truth his own curiosity was aroused, not only about that, but about these other curious things that were happening.

Philip wanted to know more. Three questions were lying upon his mind. To wit: Whether that woman was a mere clever impostor, scenting her track as she went, and so, like a hound liable to be defeated by a false trail? Whether she was a dangerous adventuress, with objects of her own in view? Or, whether there lay, behind her, any mystery passing present comprehension, and linking her and her retrospects and prophecies with the strange being his mother and Alice Cleare had seen in the garden?

"It would never do to have a town's talk made over anything connected with our sober house," mentally repeated Philip. But the pacification of Louisa was the duty of the present moment. How easily women could get flurried! Philip could not see why she should be so agitated: could not gather much reason for it from her disconnected words. The foolish girl seemed to imagine that because she had had her fortune told, she might be followed by evil and disturbing influences for the remainder of her days.

"Well, Louie," he said, aloud, "we'll tell Frank. It does not necessarily follow that papa and mamma need be told. We might

even leave Miss Evelyn Agate to find out that we haven't set much store by the secret—that we would as lief tell it as not."

But Louisa still refused to be comforted.

"What a silly girl you are! I dare say Frank's visit will bring us no end of mystification and fun. Afraid of not telling mamma, you say! Oh, come, it's no such great crime that we have committed. I'll take it all upon myself—there! They can't scold us much."

"I hardly know why I should feel like this, Philip."

"I'm sure I don't. I should not be surprised if the father goes to see the Oriental lady himself: in the ordinary course of ministerial duty and scientific inquiry, you know. Cheer up, child."

"Frank *must* go, Philip."

"Of course. And if he's afraid to visit the witch alone, I'll go with him," laughed Philip; "and if she won't let me in to hear her revelations, I'll wait at the door, and get them all hot when he comes out."

Louisa's frightened face settled down into a faint smile. She was re-assured as easily as she was flurried. But she did not tell Philip that her chief trouble was connected with the young Italian, Marco Learli.

CHAPTER XXV.

A FOREIGN TONGUE.

Frank Raven was in his own room, writing a letter to Leonard. During their brief absences from each other, the brothers had never corresponded. Frank made a mental note that this was the first letter which had ever passed between them. He would not have written now, but that he really wanted to know whether Leonard could find any clue to the identity of the figure Miss Cleare had seen in Ash Lane at Ravenscourt. Leonard was not a man to whom it would have been very easy to tell such a story, while Miss Cleare only had seen it—a strange young lady, straying alone in lonely places. But the case was altered now; and Frank had resolved to leave no stone unturned to get at the bottom of the mystery. He had no doubt that Mrs. Connell and Miss Cleare had seen a becloaked man in the garden; he had not a shadow of doubt, either, that Miss Cleare had had good reason for believing that this figure was the one she had been frightened by in the Raven Lanes. He had as little doubt that the shriek, or cry, which had rung through the house, must have come from some one who had also seen this figure on the grass-plat, and been frightened by it. Could it have been his mother? Anyway, Frank thought it was his duty to endeavour to unravel the problem.

Directly he appeared on the stairs—his letter, finished, in his hand—Philip pounced on him, and led him to the housekeeper's room, where Louisa still lingered. They, the three cousins, could be tolerably secure here of an undisturbed chat.

Louisa would have told the story, spasmodically, of their visit to the Cave, beginning with asseverations of her own repentance, but Philip speedily took the relation upon himself.

"You remember our talking over the 'Oriental Mystery,' Frank? There was enough said about it, especially by Percy. Well, do you know, old boy, after all our ridicule, some of us went to see her yesterday."

Frank laughed, He supposed they had gone in pure fun. Philip was glad of that laugh, and hastened to emphasise the mood from which it rose.

"Now, don't make sport of us, young man," he said, with mock deprecation. "You see, the girls had set their hearts on it; and so——"

Louisa could not endure this. "I'm sure I didn't," she burst out. "Frank knows it was not my idea, to begin with; and, after thinking over it, and hearing what Marco Learli and Alice Cleare said, I would not have gone near her on any account, but for that Miss Evelyn Agate."

Louisa was throwing overboard all dreams of future amity with Evelyn. Something in the companion's tone, during the later confidences of the past night, had produced such an impression on Miss Connell, that had Evelyn even made her a free offer of spending all the rest of her visit in teaching that Italian language which she so much coveted, the offer would have been spurned.

"Oh, you were glad enough to go," said Philip, vexed with her that she did not take up his cue of treating the whole thing as a joke. "And quite naturally, too. You don't have too much excitement in Coltburn."

"I'm not too sure of that," smiled Frank. "My twenty years of Raven life had never introduced me to such a drama as we had here last night."

"Oh, come, come," said Philip; "it was a Raven ghost that disturbed us, at any rate. We don't keep a ghost here, Frank; we are too humble."

"Perhaps that is why you went to a witch," quoth Frank.

"Just so," assented Philip. "Common folks must console themselves somehow. And even the witch wouldn't have anything to say to me!"

"No?"

"No. And the most sensible thing she said to the girls was, that she knew of *your* existence, Frank; that she wanted to see you very much; that she could speak to you concerning a secret matter, which nobody knows anything of but you and herself; imparting altogether, I think, a general impression that you would 'hear of something to your advantage.'"

Philip's tone and manner were light enough, but he was watching Frank narrowly. There are few men whose faces would not change

a little to hear that something they believed to be a secret was open to the eyes of some unexpected and unknown person. Frank only blushed vividly. He was aware of but one secret; it was connected with Alice Cleare; and his heart had not yet whispered of it surely to himself.

"Do go," said Philip, airily. "It will be fun to study the way in which the old prophetess tries to make fools of people. And—Frank—did you listen to that advertisement my mother read from the paper this morning?"

"Of course I did. We all listened."

"Well, look here: we believe that advertisement was intended for your eyes, and that the 'message' mentioned is the witch's wish to see you."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Frank. "Why, that message was all about the Cave—wasn't it?"

"Well, weren't we at the Cave yesterday?" returned Philip. "I'm sure you heard *that*, old fellow. It was there we held our several interviews with the witch."

"But does she attend at the Cave?"

"No. We got her to meet us there because we did not care to go to her lodgings; don't you see?"

Frank felt surprised. "Which of you went?"

"The two girls—Louisa here and Evelyn Agate; and I escorted them." And Philip went on to speak more in detail of what happened, and repeated the message to Frank.

"I'd go if I were you, Frank."

"*Do*," said Louisa, emphatically. "The woman does know strange things, and I can't imagine how it is possible she should, unless her knowledge is supernatural."

"But that must be nonsense," laughed Frank. "And pray, Philip, where am I to see her if I do go?"

"Oh, at her house, certainly. I will go with you. To tell you the whole truth," added Philip, "though it may take down your sense of self-importance, one of us must see her again, for we all forgot to pay her. And I have a shrewd suspicion that this accounts for the special urgency of her wish to see you. I suppose a sovereign will be enough."

At that instant Mrs. Connell's voice was heard calling from the dining-room, and Louisa had to hasten away in answer to it.

Philip saw his opportunity. He gave a sideway nod towards the door as it closed behind her. "You see how upset she is," he whispered. "You must go. I suspect that the Oriental Craft saw Louisa could be easily scared, and so gave her a dose of daggers, and omens, and cross-bones. Now see here, Frank; if you go to this woman, and are able to prove her the humbug she certainly is, you will do Louisa a true service. I am afraid the belief in all this has taken serious hold upon her nerves."

"Oh, I'd like to do what I can to serve or please anybody," said Frank, simply. "I can't promise not to burst out laughing in the lady's face. When are we to go?"

"Now," said Philip. "No time like the present."

As the two young men passed through the hall, they heard voices in the drawing-room, and Philip paused. For these were familiar Coltburn voices, which he had not yet heard during his present visit to his native town.

"I must go in," he whispered to Frank. "These visitors are the Misses Beck, dear old maiden ladies, great friends of my mother's. She told me they were going away on a visit, so I may not have another chance of seeing them. Will you wait for me? or try to find Daylight Villa on your own account?"

"Oh, I will wait," said Frank. "Or, stay—I can go out on an errand of my own, and look in again for you. Where shall I find a stationer's shop?"

"The shops are in quite another direction from Daylight Villa, which is by the railway station," answered Philip. "I will direct you."

He was not sorry that Frank was disposed of. He knew that the Misses Beck were great gossips, with a furtive love for the marvellous, and that they were not at all unlikely to discuss the "Oriental Mystery," and might have so prejudiced Frank against that incomprehensible potentate as to cause him to rescind his consent: and Philip estimated the Misses Beck justly. The two old ladies exclaimed their delight at seeing him, and went into a mingling of ecstacies over his splendid prospects in London and lamentations over his "London pallor," and then relapsed into their chairs and picked up the thread of their conversation where his entrance had snapped it.

"Miranda does not see things as I see them," said the elder Miss Beck, "but I say that a woman who will take half-a-crown from such a girl as our Betsy, must have the heart of a stone. A poor parish orphan, earning her bread and eight pounds a year as a domestic servant. It's shameful!"

"My dear," expostulated the calmer Miss Miranda, "if a parish orphan goes to buy anything, she has to pay for it. What would you think of any haberdasher, if, before he would sell her a ribbon (and Betsy buys too many!) he asked her, 'Are you a parish orphan, and are you sure you can afford it?' It's exactly the same thing, Esther."

"No, it is not," dissented Miss Beck, "and I'm sure Mrs. Connell must see it as I do. This woman, if she professes to know anything, ought to have known that Betsy was a parish orphan. *I* don't profess to be an Oriental Mystery, or anything out of the common, but I'm sure *I* could see 'parish orphan' stamped all over the girl in capital letters—which is a trying thing to say of one's own servant, when one can't afford to keep a better. But if it's true, it's true."

And Miss Beck sat upright and confronted the world.

"People who are heartless enough to impose on others will not pause where their cheating is likely to be a real injury," observed Mrs. Connell. "But it seems to me that the fault was the girl's own. Why did she go?"

"Ah!" groaned Miss Beck. "You can't put old heads upon young shoulders."

From these remarks, Philip gathered that Miss Beck's maid had been consulting the witch, and had not been permitted, like his party, to escape payment. He felt soothed, somehow. The woman must be but a commonplace impostor after all. Mr. Connell spoke a few words of wisdom, half jestingly.

"Now, it's a true pleasure to hear you talk, sir," exclaimed Miss Beck; "you say exactly what I wanted to say myself. If Betsy wished to know whether the grocer's young man was a fit sweetheart for her, had she not better have come to you or Mrs. Connell?—I won't say to me or Miranda, seeing that we have no experience in such things."

At this point Philip heard the hall door opened, and guessed it was by Frank, returning. So he sprang up and bade the old ladies a hasty adieu, his very hurry giving his speech an enthusiasm and warmth which highly delighted them.

The young men went off together, Philip linking his arm through Frank's, in his wonted fashion. Philip poured out the story of Miss Beck's indignation, with mimicries of that lady's quaint manner, which kept Frank interested and amused till they were in front of Daylight Villa.

The windows of that mysterious abode were as usual closely screened—"as if it were afraid of its own sponsor," Philip observed. Everything about the place had the most neglected and sordid appearance. The door-ledges were dusty, the bell-handles dull and damp, the uneven doorstep bore tramplings of dirty footmarks.

"I wonder if the Delphic oracle was always in a mess," Philip said, after he had knocked.

The door was promptly opened. Philip had brought no note with him this morning, and he found himself involved in the difficulty which Percy had humorously stated.

"Is the—is the foreign lady, who stays here, at home just now?" was his adroit way of naming the Oriental Mystery. "Can this gentleman see her? He will not detain her long."

Frank had expected that people who came upon such quests would find themselves at least objects of interest to those who must guess their business. He was quite struck by the easy, utter indifference of the dirty little serving-maid.

"Yes, Madame's in, sir," she answered, wiping her hands on her apron, "but I don't think she wants to see anybody to-day."

"Will you ask her, if you please," said Philip, with all his customary suavity of manner. "Say she has seen one of the gentle-

men before, and knows about the other. She won't want us to give our names, I am sure."

The girl seemed to listen only for the appearance of civility. Probably she knew well enough that "Madame's" refusals to be seen were guided entirely by some inner motives of Madame's own.

"I don't believe she will remember to repeat my messages," said Philip, as she went off, in seeming obedience. Certainly she scarcely remained away long enough to deliver them. She was at the door again in an instant. "Madame" was inexorable, nor did she send any excuse to soften the edge of her determination. The blunt statement was, "She can't see you to-day."

So the two young men could do nothing but retire. "Does she smell a rat?" wondered Philip. "Does she think we come as spies and foes, rather than as inquiring friends? Has my being with you anything to do with her denial of herself, think you, Frank?"

"Goodness knows."

"It's all nonsense, of course. I only wish Louisa was not so excited over it. And this unsatisfactory ending to the affair will just make her worse."

"I'll come here again to-morrow by myself," said Frank, his curiosity awakened now more than it had yet been. "We must get to the bottom of all this."

They did not return straightway to the Connells' house. Philip took his cousin with him for a saunter about the town, and he knew so many people, and all were so glad of a chat with the lively young barrister, one and another offering luncheon, that it was afternoon before they got home.

They found another visitor there. Marco Learli. He was sitting in the drawing-room with Mrs. Connell, Louisa, and Evelyn Agate. Miss Cleare was still with her pupils, and Mrs. Raven had retired to her own room, presumably to finish that letter to Leonard, which last night's catastrophe had interrupted.

Louisa's head was bowed over her needlework. Had anybody observed her narrowly, it would have been seen that a very natural dew-drop gemmed the flower she was embroidering. Mrs. Connell was talking to her guest with an air of more than usual solicitude and kindliness. Evelyn half-reclined on the sofa: there was a strange look on her face, which instantly struck Philip Connell, who knew her countenance so well. Marco's chair, placed forward in the centre of the group, was slightly turned towards her.

"I am sure Philip will be as sorry as we all are," said Mrs. Connell, turning towards her son, as he advanced with Frank into the room. "Philip, prepare for a disagreeable surprise: Signor Learli finds it necessary to leave Coltburn this evening."

"Not quite a surprise," murmured the young foreigner. "Miss Connell knows that even when I first arrived, I said my stay here was not likely to be so long as I had thought."

"Dear! but this is a sudden move!" exclaimed Philip, dropping into a chair. "Is it that the smoky atmosphere does not suit your southern constitution or your artistic inspiration? Oh, but you don't really mean it? Not to-night, at any rate! You are only harrowing our feelings."

"It is my own feelings that are harrowed," said the young painter, in his musical tones, with a sudden flashing glance of his dark eyes towards Evelyn. "Nay, I can never be better nor happier than I might be at Coltburn. If I waited till my own will took me hence, I might remain here for ever."

"I hope you have had no bad news," resumed Philip, seriously.

The Italian's face changed. Its soft, graceful lines seemed to grow strong and hard; and a strange darkness, so palpable that it seemed almost of the body as well as the spirit, settled on his brow.

"The command of necessity and the call of duty cannot be bad news," he said, sternly. With the last word he looked up, and met Mrs. Connell's kind eyes, fixed on him in motherly tenderness. The ice that had closed about him seemed to melt instantly. His lip even quivered.

"And Signor Learli will not say when we are to see him again," said she to the others. "I want him to give me a promise for Christmas."

The young Italian shook his head. "The stray leaf goes before the wind," he answered. "The wind, and not the leaf, decides where it shall drop."

"But you think you shall be in this country then?" asked Mrs. Connell.

Marco did not answer readily. He reflected for a moment, and then said, simply:

"Yes."

Louisa looked up as he paused. She had commanded her face at last, and for a moment her eyes were free from tears. She longed to say to Marco, what would have seemed only natural civility to say, but for her consciousness of loving him so well—that surely he would not leave England without letting them know it, and, perhaps, seeing them before he went.

But the eyes that she fondly thought might have met her own were turned from her, and her glance only encountered Evelyn's. There was something in that glance which saved Louisa's poor woollen flowers from any more dewdrops! But her eyes burned and throbbed as in sharp contact with a cruel wind.

Then came another moment's silence. Marco broke it, by saying to Evelyn, in a low voice: "Let me hear you speak to me once more in the tongue of my own country."

She started up, and then sat down erect.

"You hear him," she said, looking round, as in apology. "Pardon him—and me—but it is so natural!"

And straightway she went on in Italian, her manner sweet, her eyes fixed on him. "What shall I say? I have no beautiful thoughts to utter! What can I wish you, when I do not know what you wish for yourself? Only believe that I always wish you well."

Marco answered in the same language, his impassioned tone hardly suppressed. "When I hear your voice, it is enough. Will you think of me while I am away? Will it matter to *you* whether or not I ever return?"

"Will it not?" she said, softly.

"Confound it!" thought Philip. "I wish I had made myself a more fluent Latin scholar, and then I should surely be able to make out a word here and there! It is my private impression that they are saying something uncommonly sweet."

Louisa rose, gently laid her work aside, and retired. Marco did not even seem to notice her going.

"All your friends here hope to see you again," said Evelyn.

"Do *you?*" he asked, passionately.

"I do," she said, dropping her eyelids. Mrs. Connell thought the girl was showing more womanly feeling than she had believed she possessed, for she seemed to be trembling. This sudden and desperate avowal of the passion she had consciously awakened, had actually startled even Evelyn Agate.

In the moment Marco first set eyes on her, he had awakened to the fact, that his fancy for Louisa Connell had been nothing but a pleasant friendship.

"If I live, you shall see me again," he murmured in answer. "Not here. Somewhere else—where we can speak together face to face, unheard, unwatched. I know where to find you. Every fact I have heard about you, is garnered in my heart. For a while, think of me. If I never come, forget me. Say to yourself, 'one more unhappy one is gone to his rest.'"

"I shall wait for you," said Evelyn, calmly. "Believe that."

They were standing up now, side by side, for he had risen to leave. He held out his hand and took hers. No other pledge was possible between the two then and there; and perhaps no tenderer caress would have been in harmony with Marco's high-strung mood. You would not have guessed them to be a pair of parting lovers; they did not look like it. Mrs. Connell thought only that the lad's poetic imagination and hungry heart had transformed the simple girl who spoke his mother-tongue, into an inspiring genius—a personification of his own restless patriotism.

They followed him through the hall to the very door. He did not ask after Percy (who was out), or Alice Cleare, or the little girls; no, nor after Mr. Connell.

Did he remember that he had not said good-bye to Louisa? She, standing in her own room, with clasped hands and straining eyes, wondered if she could run down and snatch a hasty farewell, whether

she was heeded or not. If she let him go without one, how would she feel after he was gone? But, oh! he was sure to ask for her at the very last; and if she had courage and faith to wait for that, it would leave her so much happier than if she sought it. She could hear the voices talking.

"Are you going straight from Coltburn?" Philip asked. "Shall you leave by the last train? Would it not be nice if some of us ran down to the station at the last, and saw you off?"

There was a moment's hesitation before Marco replied. "My movements are a little uncertain," he said then. "I may have to go a short way out of the town to transact a slight matter of business on my way. If so, I shall drive on thence and catch the train at the next station. I would rather part with you here—at the door of your own home. Good-bye! good-bye!"

He was gone—without one word or thought for Louisa! She threw herself on her bed, and it was the same to the poor girl as if all the world had come to an end.

The others went back to the drawing-room. If there was fire in Evelyn's eyes, there was moisture in Mrs. Connell's.

"Poor boy!" she said. "There is certainly some mystery about him. I always fancy he feels something looming before his path. What can it be? I suppose creatures as slight as he, in the eyes of their contemporaries, have had their hand in the world's history before now."

As she spoke, she went to the window and hasped it, and drew the curtains. They would not be in that room again till all was dark, and after the preceding night, she felt a little nervous.

It was the tapping of Evelyn at Louisa's door which aroused the girl from her ecstacy of pain—Evelyn's rap and her clear, bell-like tone, announcing that it would soon be dinner time. And poor Louisa, with true womanly instinct, struggled to suppress all signs of misery, and went forth apparently calm. The breaking-down might come later, but it should not be in the sight of Evelyn.

In honour of the presence of Mrs. Raven, accustomed to state and show, the Connell dinners were made much more formal affairs than when the family were alone. In this respect, at least, Mrs. Connell had refused Philip's advice to persist in the ordinary household programme, and make no difference of any kind. Dessert was on the table, when the servant came in and whispered something to Louisa, which caused her face to flush vividly, as she instructed the girl to "tell mamma."

"Marco Learli back again!" exclaimed Mrs. Connell. "He says we are not to be interrupted if we are at dinner; he will wait. For whom did he ask, Julia?"

"For me, surely!" cried Percy, springing to his feet.

"No, sir," said the girl; "he asked for Miss Connell."

"You had better go to him at once, Louisa," said her mother

"and if he can really wait, stay with him until we have finished."

"You see I was right," whispered Evelyn to Philip.

"Right?" he replied, not understanding her.

"That some adieux cannot be made in public."

"Hang it!" thought Philip, glancing at his adversary. "She's playing with us all somehow—as false as a hare!"

How light a heart can grow in a moment! Louisa wondered how she could ever have doubted Marco. She saw now what it was—that he had never forgotten her—it was but the coyness of love which had withheld him from asking for her—just as the desperate pain of silent parting had now driven him back. He had come, and that was enough.

But as she entered the drawing-room she started. Where was he? Had he vanished? Before she had time for a thought, he stepped forward from the window, letting the curtains close again behind him. Oh, what a face of agony he had! And how strange it was that even that did not make her feel less happy.

"I have come to say good-bye," he said, "and to bring back that."

He held out a little volume of poems with Louisa's name in it, which they had read together during their first meetings by the sea, and which he had retained in memory of those happy days.

"It was a gift," gasped Louisa. After all, there was something in his face which frightened her. This was no lover's sorrow. It was terror; it was despair.

"Take it again," he said, in that strange, low voice; "take it, and forget me. I shall never forget you,"—Louisa's heart leaped—"nor your mother, nor your home. It was a vision I had, and it is gone. Well for you that it is so! Good-bye, Miss Connell! good-bye for ever!"

"Oh, Marco, do not go like this!" sobbed the girl, in heart-rending bewilderment, as he turned to the door. She felt herself powerless as a silken thread to hold him, and in her misery she uttered what she knew were futile pleas the moment they passed her lips: "Stay and see papa—and Percy."

"Let me go," he cried, drawing away his hand. "It was all a mistake, and we must part."

And here again Louisa's weakness came to her rescue. A larger nature would have been maddened by its pain into utter unconsciousness of everything except its present anguish. But Louisa remembered Evelyn, and the slow tortures of days to come. Without a word she walked out of the drawing-room before Marco. Without a word she stepped before him down the hall. But at the dining-room door she paused, and threw it open.

"Papa, Percy, Signor Learli came back to say good-bye to you; and as he is really in haste, I know you don't mind being interrupted."

Despite his unwillingness, he had to enter; and that was how it ended—in another round of hand-shakings and inquiries and regrets. Evelyn did not leave her seat at the dining-table, and Louisa came back and resumed hers before the door had closed behind Marco.

Everybody retired early, because everybody was tired. No disturbance occurred that night. But in that small, quiet, comfortable household there were two—one of the young people and one of the seniors—who never closed their eyes.

One lay with her face buried in her pillow. The other drew her curtains aside, and sat down beside her unscreened window—and watched.

What did Mrs. Raven watch for! What did she see? Why did she find herself an hour afterwards returning to consciousness seated in her chair by the window, her candle burned down, and the moon, which had been shining so brightly, lost behind thick clouds? If she had told Philip what she had seen, he might have answered her that dreams are strange combinations of the facts and fancies of past hours.

But when we are not sure of ourselves whether we are waking or sleeping; when we feel that if our fancies are fancies they are worse than facts, because they leave no solid ground whereon to set our own soul, then we begin to keep our own counsel.

But nobody was disturbed that night by any sound in Mr. Connell's house.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ADMITTED

THE next morning rose dull and grey, with a fine drizzle of rain, one of those genuinely English days which come at the most unexpected seasons, and serve, at least, as material for conversation.

Mrs. Raven did not appear at breakfast. Word came down that she was not well. And when Mrs. Connell went to see her she was struck with her nervous and wrung appearance. She thought that these manifest traces of suffering must be latent: this passing indisposition surely could not produce them! The kind woman's heart warmed to her. She was her brother's widow, after all.

Mrs. Connell was startled to find that Mrs. Raven seemed to have set her heart on going home, saying that she found she was in no condition to be anybody's guest, and that she feared that change, from which she had hoped so much, was only making her worse.

"My dear—sister," Mrs. Connell actually said, in her compassion, "You have not given it a fair trial yet. I believe that fright the other night has upset you. You must not imagine such a thing is likely to occur again. I can assure you such incidents are as rare here as they

can be at Raven. I know how you country folk credit towns with everything that is uncomfortable and wicked. But we have lived here nearly thirty years, and nothing of this sort has happened before."

"Perhaps it happened in my honour," said Mrs. Raven, with a sickly smile. "You ought to be glad to get quit of me."

Mrs. Connell protested, and then went off to her kitchen to give sundry directions about dainties for the invalid's lunch. She gathered an impression that that domestic section of her house was not in perfect peace. Minton was in a state of dignified displeasure with Julia, the younger servant. But the mistress did not choose to make any inquiries. Mrs. Connell rarely interfered with her delegates in kitchen or school-room. If they were found not fit to be trusted, then it was time for them to be deposed.

Certainly there was no gainsaying the good sense of the remark which Mrs. Connell overheard falling from Minton's lips.

"Don't tell me any falsehoods, Julia," said that worthy woman. "That's sure to be the upshot of flurries and hurries and frights, and things that can't be accounted for. They serve well enough as excuses for ways that need excuses. It isn't the first time that you've not known what you were doing. There! say no more. If you had done it, as was your duty, and as you say it was done, then I should have found it done this morning, and there's an end on't."

When Mrs. Connell returned to the sick-room, she met her nephew coming out of it. Frank had been paying his mother a visit. To him, too, she spoke of a speedy return home. She would go as soon as possible. She could not rise to-day, but she would be able to travel to-morrow.

"I don't think you should have left your room either, Miss Connell," said Evelyn, addressing Louisa later. "I am quite sure you are suffering like your aunt; and, like her, you would have been better at rest and in quietness."

"I always suffer when I lose any sleep," answered Louisa, bravely; "but I never allow myself to give way to mere sensations of languor and weariness."

Frank looked at his cousin when he heard this little colloquy. How pale and changed she was! Was this the same girl whose blooming beauty had so struck him when he first arrived at Coltburn so short a time back? And the havoc in her appearance seemed to have been wrought in the last few hours.

Frank wondered. Had Louisa's nerves really been so shaken by the interview with the woman—in conjunction possibly with the fright that occurred the following night? He recalled his promise to go to her to-day.

Only he shrank from it. It was odd how reluctant he felt to do what he knew to be contrary to the views held by Alice Cleare. Why should the wisdom of this young governess, younger even than

himself, have so much weight with him? To be sure it came commended by her sweet face and patient, cheerful life; which, since he knew what he knew of her losses and sorrows and heroisms, seemed to him as a life bearing witness of the goodness of God.

"Miss Cleare," he said to her, lingering in the morning-room after breakfast, while she was busily correcting one of her pupil's exercises, "does it puzzle you very much if people don't always act as if they saw things in what you see to be the right light?"

Alice laughed aloud. "Do you mean to insinuate that I always think I am right?" she asked merrily.

"No, no, certainly not," he answered, flushing, as he saw how easily his speech could bear this playful interpretation, and felt how hard it was to express his real meaning. "No, no; but would you imagine that anybody must surely set very light value on your opinions if they did not entirely follow them out?"

Alice was quite grave now. She looked up at him with her pure, sweet eyes, as she answered, "I should be quite satisfied with whatever anybody did, if I felt sure they were only seeking to do what was right and kind. Opinions may differ about details, but I think those who honestly seek to follow good and escape evil are sure to meet at the goal. Opinions change, too. Some matters which I once deemed harmless, I now think wrong, and in what I once thought I saw harm, I now see none."

"It is not always easy to know what is right," Frank observed.

Alice went on diligently with her work. "To do that which really seems to us right is the surest way to learn what is best, I believe," she said timidly; "though in the course of the lesson we may have to undo our own work."

"Thank you, Miss Cleare," said Frank. "So, if I do my best, you will be really satisfied with me—though my best may be poor enough! There have not been too many people satisfied with me yet!" he added, a little sadly.

From this conversation, he went, without speaking to Philip, straight off to Daylight Villa. He did not like his errand, but he had, in a manner, promised to go, to help Louisa—not but that it was a bit of a puzzle to him, a thing he had never understood quite clearly, how anything the witch might communicate to himself would relieve Louisa's state of nervous terror.

Would the strange woman refuse to see him again? If so, he could not help it. He would not allow himself to think whether he would be glad or sorry; or even whether, or no, he expected another denial.

But this time the untidy serving-girl opened wide the door.

"Madame is at home," she said, "and quite disengaged."

(*To be continued.*)

MY SATURDAYS.

CYPRUS LAWN.

I.

THE first question is—how came I to have Saturdays? No; perhaps there is a prior question—who am I that have them? Let me introduce myself as briefly as possible. Vera Singleton, widow, no children, age of no importance, circumstances comfortable, resident at Tamston. That is quite as much, I think, as I need say about myself, before I go back to the very primal origin of my Saturdays. One chilly May afternoon, when Charlotte Stamwood (our Rector's second daughter) and Lucilla Minton (daughter of the Honourable Mrs. Minton) were drinking my tea, and plotting against my peace. Charlotte had sat down on the rug in front of a little bit of fire—for the afternoon was rather rainy and chilly, and I don't block up my grates by the almanack—and began artfully:

"It *is* so nice and cheerful to see a fire again, when everybody is trying so hard to believe that it is spring, and failing so miserably in the attempt. That is one of your strong points, Mrs. Singleton; you always see what is wanted, and go straight and do it, whether it happens to be *de rigueur* or not."

"Mrs. Singleton loves to make everyone happy, in great things and small," chimed in Lucilla.

"Girls," I said, "this is too much. Something is coming upon me; I know the symptoms."

"And do you meanly shrink?" answered Charlotte, magnificently. "Do not all gifts bring responsibilities? If you have an original mind, ought you not to do original things? If you have a benevolent heart, will you not seek the happiness of your fellow-creatures? If you have a charming house, will you not open its doors? And if you have a delightful garden, going down to the river, and a lawn big enough for tennis—will you not—oh, dear, Mrs. Singleton, *do*—give garden-parties in summer?"

Charlotte twisted herself round at the end of her pathetic appeal, and knelt at my feet, with a comical expression of entreaty; and Lucilla dropped down beside her, and joined in her supplications.

"Seriously, you might do a great deal of good," continued Charlotte. "Society in Tamston is so horribly clique-ish, and numbers of people don't know each other who would really get on well, if they only put aside their nonsense for once, and found out their links instead of looking at their fences. You could ask people together in that informal way whom you could not invite to meet each other at dinner, and as you have always kept out of those tangles, you are in a position to do it."

The little minx had touched one of my weak points. I knew quite well that she was only repeating what she had heard me say a dozen times; but her words conjured up a vision of class-differences smoothed away, and social bonds drawn closer on my lawn, and I myself dispensing tea and gentle influences, a sort of Spirit of Harmony. The more I looked at that pretty picture the better I liked it; and the result was that I sent round cards to all my acquaintances in Tamston, announcing that I should be at home on the first Saturday afternoon in June, and on all subsequent Saturdays until further notice. I felt decidedly nervous about the first, and chartered my nephew, Archibald Rintoul, to come down for it, and help me through—under a distinct engagement to play one game of tennis with Lucilla Minton, get her tea, and then no more. Archibald had serious love-affairs of his own, but they were just then in a tangled condition; and he is a man who, without the least treachery to the eyes that are far, gets all the fun possible out of the eyes that are near. At the beginning of the summer and my enterprise, a flirtation would be far too serious a matter; neither could I have Lucilla's spirits damped by neglect. Archibald promised all possible discretion, and engaged two of his friends to row up with him from Richmond, and add to the London element of my party. He himself was a writer and magazine editor, a clever and agreeable man, whose presence would carry me a long way towards success. And so, having made my cakes, and ordered my ices, I awaited with some composure my first appearance as a leader of society.

II.

THAT first Saturday was all that a day in a late June should be. The air was sweet with may-blossom, the heavy spikes of lilac swung slowly back and forwards, and poured their fragrance into it; a golden rain of laburnum glorified my garden walks; the crimson hawthorn blossomed boldly, taking precedence of the roses, which as yet only put out a flower here and there to compete with it. Down among the uncut grass in their own private nook, the violets were waiting to be sought for; and the magnificent horse-chestnut waved faintly his great fans of green, and delicate cones of pink and white, over the wall which divided my domain from Cyprus Lawn.

I depended upon my next-door neighbours as an element in the success of my Saturdays, though it was always impossible to be sure of them. Professor Lingard was a man of about forty, thin and sallow. His fine blue eyes had dark hollows under them, and plaintive lines ran down from the eyebrows, and deepened the troubled expression of the high, pale forehead. No face with those eyes and that brow could be quite uninteresting; but when the Professor was depressed, or nervous, or really unwell (and all three were frequent occurrences), he collapsed, and looked like a sick lizard. A really learned and able man, he had made small mark upon the world, chiefly for

want of "grit." His friends wondered that he had not done more; and he knew that they wondered, and felt himself a disappointment and a failure, and so failed the more, from want of spirit to succeed. He had a small income, and a Professorship of History in one of the London colleges; and as he and his wife had no children, they got on fairly as to money matters, though with a good deal of management on Rhoda's part.

Rhoda had life and colour enough for two. Some fifteen years younger than her husband, worry had not worn away her bright Irish prettiness. Her soft, grey eyes were still ready to dance and sparkle, though they had shed a good many tears; and she threw herself impulsively into everything that was going on, taking up every new plan or topic as eagerly as if disappointment and failure had not been household words for her. Yet she was not quite the perfect wife for such a man. He gave her a melancholy fondness, as to a bright young creature whose life he had hopelessly overshadowed; and she was devoted to him, but had not succeeded in being much positive help to him. At first she had believed in him altogether; but when she saw him let opportunity after opportunity slip through his fingers, for want of a push at the right time, she lost her faith, and had a hard struggle not to despise him. She could not trust her own impetuous temper, and resolved once for all to accept the inevitable. He could not succeed; there was something wanting among all his gifts which doomed him to failure; she would be patient, bear her share of the trouble, and make his as light to him as possible. And so the Professor—who was sensitive to all influences—knew that his wife, too, held him a failure; and he endured her cheerful exhortations as a man dying of consumption might a mustard-plaster,—a well-meant irritation, quite useless for purposes of cure, but not likely to last long.

The chief standing trouble of their lives was the Island of Cyprus. Perhaps I should rather say—the failure of a great book which the Professor had written upon it; but really the island itself seemed to exercise a malign influence upon them. He had studied it and its antiquities very profoundly before his marriage, ridden and walked about it a great deal, and become well acquainted with a place in which hardly anyone then took the slightest interest. He had collected the greater part of his materials before he met Rhoda, and fell in love with her in the absorbed, sudden fashion of a student who had never fairly looked a woman in the face before, and believed that the one intelligent member of her sex was entirely exceptional.

Of course they went to Cyprus for their honeymoon, and had their only really happy time, roughing it in all sorts of ways, and making progress with the great work, which Rhoda wrote at her husband's dictation. It was interrupted by his falling ill of malaria fever and ague, and poor Rhoda had a terrible six weeks nursing him, far away from English doctors and trustworthy medicines. He recovered at

last; but his health, which was never strong, had been seriously shaken, and the ague always hovered near.

Then, when the book was finished, it could not be published. It was a mass of learning—topographical, geological, meteorological detail, antiquarian discoveries and theories, historical discussions, the whole lightened by accounts of personal adventures in search of the facts given; but the result was an ill-arranged accumulation of information that few people wanted, and no publisher would undertake. Rhoda wished to sell out some of their little capital, and publish the book at their own expense; but he was too timid to burn their boats in such a fashion, and indeed it would have been a great risk, though necessity might have inspired him with energy. He did send one rather heavy article to the editor of a popular magazine, and when it was declined, could never be induced to try another. So now they had given up hope, the MS. was locked away, and they avoided talking of the place, whose very name seemed impossible to escape. They had fastened it upon themselves, by dubbing their little house—when they first came to it, happy at the Professor's recovery, and with the book almost finished—Cyprus Lawn, playing on the word, in half allusion to Il Penseroso; and they had celebrated their arrival by planting a wretched little cypress, which at first looked as miserable as a shrub well could, but seemed to flourish, vampire-like, on their sickening hopes.

In spite of all these troubles, the Lingards were a great acquisition to the neighbourhood. The Professor was brighter in society than often at home; he could talk eloquently and sometimes amusingly, and his range of subjects was very wide. He could not chatter nothings, or discuss the weather or local politics with interest; but he intensely enjoyed real conversation, and was no monopolist, loving to share his thoughts, and breathe the subtle changes of air which blow from other people's minds. If he were dull, Rhoda hung about wistfully, trying to lead him into talk, and make up his deficiencies; but when she saw him interested and happy, she would go off, and be the life of the party, chattering, laughing, playing games, doing everything lively but flirting.

So when my guests began to assemble, I anxiously scanned the Lingards, as they came round the corner of the house to where I was receiving on the lawn, and was relieved to see the Professor swinging his tennis-racquet. I knew in a moment that he was in a cheerful and sociable state of mind. Rhoda, in a soft, trailing white cashmere, with bunches of late primroses in her dress, and white muslin-trimmed hat, looked an incarnation of the spring.

All Tamston honoured me with its company. The Honourable Mrs. Minton rustled her brown and old-gold silk up and down and round on the gravel, until a subdued hiss seemed to pervade the place; Lucilla chirped about on her own account; Mrs. Stamwood and the girls appeared early, and the Rector looked in upon us in the

afternoon, with an indulgent father-of-his-people air; Captain Perth and his daughters came from Fir Grove to see how I should get on—I fear with a mild expectation that I should fail, and that they would be able to bear it. The Doctor was there, and of course had to go away in the middle; the Curate came early and stayed late, with a vigorous determination to enjoy himself; various young men, come down for Sunday, accompanied their families or hosts; and there were two groups of county people, not often captured at Tamston entertainments.

Tennis was started at once, Archibald diligently doing his duty by Lucilla; tea and talk were soon in full swing among little knots under the trees; and I looked round at the populated garden with pardonable complacency. Rhoda Lingard and young Mr. Minton played the first game against Archibald and Lucilla; and when it was finished, I arranged the next to include the Professor, who was a capital player. Meantime the quartette were taking tea together, and I took the opportunity of introducing one of Archie's friends to Lucilla, to break up the pairs.

I had introduced Archibald to Rhoda when the game began, and now they drifted into interested talk over their cups of tea. Lucilla and her new cavalier went off; but the others sat on, and after a time moved away, only to walk round and round the garden in eager conversation. The Professor was absorbed in his game; the sides were so evenly matched that it was a long one, and when it was over, they kept possession of the ground, and turned it into a match. This was not fair to other people, but I would not interfere while Rhoda was engrossed. It was not often that she had a chance of a real talk with a clever man, and I knew how she would throw herself into it, and forget everything outside. So the Professor stood in readiness like a waiting cat, and sprang from side to side with feline rushes—his hair flapping, his face, for once, crimson, and his blue eyes aflame with the ardour of battle; while his wife and my nephew paced and talked. The talk ended before the match did, and Rhoda came up to me, bright-eyed and radiant.

"Vera, I am so happy. Mr. Rintoul has given me such hope. We can't talk now; I will come in to-morrow afternoon, and tell you all about it. There! Edwin has finished his game: you won't mind our going early, will you? I want to talk to him so much. I am sure your party is a great success; I have enjoyed myself beyond everything." And as soon as she could draw away her husband from discussing his game and drinking cider-cup, they went off—Rhoda holding his arm, and evidently beginning to pour out her eagerness to him before they were round the corner of the house.

The afternoon crept on as other afternoons do, and gradually people went off to their respective dinners; a few lingerers at tennis played on desperately, until my maids began to collect cups and saucers, and then, struck with remorse, they set to work to carry chairs

and sofas indoors. So, by-and-bye, my dwelling was restored to its usual order, Lucilla had waved her farewell to the Londoners as they rowed down the river, and at last taken her mother off my hands; and I sat down, tired but triumphant, to administer a substantial tea to Archibald, and hear what his wide experience thought of my début.

"It was very fair, auntie; very fair, indeed. Games well kept up, plenty of talk, people well mixed. Eatables and everything of that sort, first-rate. The question is: Shall you be able to keep it up? It will do very well if you are a woman of original mind, and can have a little variety every time, and keep something going; otherwise, there is danger of *toujours perdrix*."

"I must try," I said. "At any rate, I have made a good start, and I look to you for some of the variety. Mind, you have carte blanche to bring or send anyone you think an addition."

"You don't suppose I have an unlimited stock of nice young men for small tea-parties, do you? After all, the great question is, how much do you local people care to see of each other?"

"I fancy that we have social materials here," I returned, "though rather in a state of disintegration; but time will show. By-the-bye, you seemed to find a sympathetic listener in my friend Rhoda."

"I should think so. She is clever enough to understand what is said to her, and has something to say on her own account; and then, every now and again, she comes out with something so deliciously silly that you feel she would be nowhere if you did not look after her."

"And, pray, in what manner do you propose to look after Mrs. Lingard?"

"Come, auntie, give me credit for not meaning an impertinence. Mrs. Lingard is one of those sweet, soft, impulsive women who are capable of great follies and sublime heroism, and both together; their fairness makes life harmonious, and their caprices make it interesting: they do none of the work of the world, or do it ill, but they alone make it worth doing. In her individual capacity she appears to me to be a pretty woman, with a rather helpless husband on her hands; but if he really has half the brains she says (which probably he hasn't), I may be able to do something for him."

"He has plenty of brains, as you would find out in half an hour's talk with him, providing he had not ague coming on, or dyspepsia going off, or a headache in full course, and that the wind was not in the east. But how do you see a chance for him?"

"Only because he seems to know a good deal about a subject which is coming to the front. Nobody cared a halfpenny about Cyprus until we put down our thumb on it; but now everything about it is of interest to some one. A man who really has stores of information ready to hand, worked up into some kind of shape, is sure of a market, if he only knows how to go about his selling. But

these amateurs think that if they cannot sell hot potatoes at Midsummer, it is a sign that nobody wants them at Christmas. Lingard might have been in print weeks ago, if his stuff is worth anything."

"Are you going to talk to him?"

"Of course I can't interfere further than I am asked to do. I have explained all this to Mrs. Lingard, and told her that if her husband cares to talk the matter over with me, I shall be very happy to put my experience at his command."

Archibald smoked and dozed in the punt all Sunday afternoon, evidently expecting the Lingards; but they did not appear. When the bells were ringing for evening service, however, Rhoda came in on her way to church, dressed with Sunday precision in black silk, with a neat little neutral-coloured bonnet. Romance, brightness and beauty were gone out of her fashionable dress and composed pale face; her eyes were a little pink, and she spoke as if she had considered what she was going to say.

"I only came in as I was going to church, to tell you, Mr. Rintoul, that I am afraid I was too impulsive in presuming on your kindness yesterday. I often speak hastily, without thinking enough first. My husband does not consider that there would be any use in doing anything about his book, and it would not be fair to give you so much trouble for nothing. I ought to have remembered how valuable your time was."

"I assure you," answered Archibald earnestly, "that it would not be giving me any trouble at all. It would be a pleasure to me."

"You are very good," Rhoda answered, "but Professor Lingard has quite made up his mind to let the matter alone. I feel your kindness very much, and I did hope that something might have been done, but I see it is impossible."

She spoke almost tearfully. Archibald grew more eager as the obstacles towered higher.

"But why, Mrs. Lingard? Can nothing be done to persuade him? There is a real opening for the book now."

"Oh yes, I told him all that you said; but it is of no use. He has been so often disappointed that he cannot bear to be disappointed any more. And I cannot urge him again—it worries him too much. I lose courage myself when I remember what we went through before, when the book was going round from publisher to publisher, and think of having that all over again. We have failed, and we must accept failure. We only hurt ourselves by fresh efforts."

She had drawn back her tears, and spoke with steady calm. Archibald became unusually excited.

"Accept failure!" he exclaimed. "That is talking sheer nonsense. Thackeray failed, Disraeli failed, Defoe failed, Milton failed. Did any of them accept failure? Should we have half-a-dozen great

writers now, if our leaders had accepted failure? A man who accepts failure is one who deserves to fail."

I was afraid Rhoda would be dreadfully hurt, but she was not applying the hard words to her husband at all. Her eyes brightened, and her cheeks flushed; she was simply inspirited by the stimulus, as by a rough splash of cold water.

"You are quite right, Mr. Rintoul," she exclaimed; "it is base to despair. If there were anything I could do, I would do it, except worry my husband any more. But you see there is not even any definite proposal to put before him."

"And I cannot make one in the dark. If I could get a sight of the manuscript: could you manage that?"

Rhoda shook her head.

"There is not a rough copy of any part of it? Even one chapter would be a specimen from which I could form some idea of the rest."

"Yes," cried Rhoda, "I kept all the rough notes, but you could never read them: some of them are in Edwin's worst scrawl, and some in mine, and corrected and altered over and over again by both of us. I could copy them for you, though. Oh, would not that do?"

She clasped her hands excitedly. Archibald was scarcely less excited.

"Of course it would do; the problem is solved. But don't begin at the beginning, and toil on to the end. Make out a list of the subjects of the different chapters, and I will tell you which to copy. If you send it to my aunt as soon as it is ready, she will forward it to me, and so no time will be lost. Or you had better send it direct; here is my card. I shall be down again next Saturday, and by that time we shall begin to see where we are."

"Thank you, thank you a thousand times. I felt as if a door had opened before me yesterday, and then it shut so closely again; it was worse than if it had never opened. You men don't know how dreadful it is to sit still and watch other people *not* doing things, and not be able to lift a finger."

Rhoda had spoken more of her heart in those last words than she had at all intended, and took leave hurriedly, rather frightened at herself. Archibald remarked, meditatively:

"That's a sweet little woman, but I am an everlasting fool. If the book turns out rubbish, *what* a mess I have got into!"

III.

I saw and heard nothing more of the Lingards until Wednesday, when Rhoda came in at afternoon tea-time, looking tired, but bright.

"Sit down, dear," I said, "and drink a cup of tea before you begin to tell me how you come to have such pale cheeks."

"The tea by all means, ever-hospitable Vera; but I can talk while you are pouring it out. Edwin has had one of his upsets; I suppose that is why I look rather the worse for wear."

"I am sorry to hear it: nothing very bad, I hope?"

"I am afraid it was bringing up that wretched Cyprus business again; it reminds him of so many standing troubles, and when he once begins to worry, he cannot leave off. And worry always knocks him up. We have had a very pénible three days."

"Poor child," I said, pityingly. (I always found it difficult to pity the Professor.)

"Oh, Vera, it is hard!" she exclaimed, dropping her hands in her lap, and looking at me with pathetic eyes. "It is like Gulliver in Lilliput—tied down by his hair. There is an end to be gained, a victory to be won, and plenty of strength to do it—strength of brain in him, strength of will in me. And when we would throw ourselves at it, we are held back by miserable little bonds which no one else can see, but which make any movement such intolerable pain."

"I know, dear; I think I understand."

"I am sure you do; but you know I cannot explain it to Mr. Rintoul; he must think what he likes. It is plainer than ever that my husband cannot stand any discussion of the subject, until there is positive, certain good news; and it is plain, too, that it will not do to lose this chance. So I will do all that is needed myself, and keep it a secret from him. I hate anything under-hand, but I see no other way. You will help me through, won't you?"

"Certainly I will. And now that you have made up your mind, we won't think about the difficulties except as they arise. What about the list?"

She took a paper out of her pocket, and waved it triumphantly.

"There it is, and hard work I have had to get it. The notes were stowed away in the most un-get-at-able corner of the lumber-room; and when I found them, they were in such utter confusion that it took me hours to put the chapters together. It was like making up a dissected map. Now, will you post it to Mr. Rintoul for me at once?"

I duly forwarded the list to Archibald. On Friday I had a hurried note from him: "Tell Mrs. Lingard to copy the chapters on 'Antiquities,' 'Climate and Soil,' and 'Personal Adventures,' and to let me have them as done. Will be down to-morrow."

Armed with this, I went in to inquire after the Professor, and express my hopes of seeing him next day. He was in one of his moods of depression, and owned himself to be feeling oppressed by the warm weather. He put it differently:

"It is too much for me, Mrs. Singleton—this blaze of colour and breath of incense everywhere. I am out of tune, I fear. At any rate, I should certainly be so at your merry party."

I grew cross, and tired of persuading him; so I said good-bye.

Rhoda accompanied me to the garden-gate, and I gave her Archibald's directions. Her face lighted up.

"Oh, it will be delightful to be fairly at work! Though how I shall do it without Edwin's finding out, I cannot imagine. He is always coming in when I don't expect him."

"Bring in your writing to my house whenever you can, then," I answered, "and perhaps I can help you with it. Good-bye, dear; I wish I were to have you to-morrow."

"Thanks; but it is better not, just now, and I cannot bear to waste time."

Back she went, with her quick, elastic step; and I devoted myself to superintending the fixing of an Aunt Sally, intended to divert Lucilla and a few of the bolder spirits from the tennis-ground.

There is not much to record about my second Saturday. Aunt Sally was fairly patronized; and I provided crackers for prizes, which gave rise to a mild excitement and some small jokes. A few of the elderly gentlemen condescended to try their chance; tea and tennis went on as usual, and there was a little variety in the guests. Altogether, it did very well. Archie, however, declared that it was flat. Lucilla bored him; he took to tennis to escape her, and had a bad partner; and he was evidently annoyed at Rhoda's absence. It had not occurred to him before that while he was interested in the work for the sake of her, she was interested in him for the sake of the work; and he did not like the idea. All these circumstances being perfectly obvious to me, I was not much ruffled by being reminded that he had told me I could not keep it up, and that to make a thing of the kind an institution, one required large grounds and unlimited resources. Nor did I deeply regret that he was unable to stay for Sunday.

On Monday, Rhoda came in to begin her work. We divided the heterogeneous pages of the chapter on "Antiquities" between us, I taking the first part, and worked away steadily for an hour and a half—as long as Rhoda ventured to stay. When she went away, I kept my share, determining to give an hour a day to it, in hopes that the whole chapter might be ready for Archibald on Saturday. I made but slow progress, though; and greatly was I surprised when Rhoda appeared on Thursday, having finished her part, to fetch whatever remained to be done.

"My dear, how you must have worked! When did you do it?"

"Early and late," laughed Rhoda; "I get up a quarter of an hour earlier, and somehow breakfast is not quite so punctual as it used to be, and a page or two get written. I have quite time to finish the rest of this by Saturday afternoon; I will not have you bore yourself any more this week."

Truth to tell, I was not sorry to get off; for if there is one subject

of which I am more ignorant than another, it is archæology; and as to whether a particular temple—of which about six stones are remaining—was dedicated to Aphrodite or Eros, I cannot induce myself to care in the least. I could see that the writing was extremely good, but the chapter on "Antiquities" seemed to me too long to form an item in any book not dedicated to Methuselah.

I had prepared a grand *coup* for Saturday. A little way above my lawn was an islet in the river, belonging to old Mr. Merton, always a great ally of mine. Nothing grew upon it but willows, and it was only used as a centre for punt-fishing. I fixed my strategic eye upon it as a point of vantage, and the kind owner gave me leave to do whatever I liked with it all the summer. There was an open, grassy bank at one side; there I had a wooden step fixed to make the landing easy, and a few rugs thrown about on which to sit. On the top of the island I had the willows cleared away, and a small tent pitched, with seats round it.

Here I established one of my maids with strawberries and cream, which were then just coming in. As they were not to be had upon the mainland, an excellent reason was at once established for any amount of punting and boating, and constant movement was kept up, while I held in my hands a tremendous power of pairing and separating my guests at pleasure. The plan was crowned with success, and it realised my fondest expectations when Archibald pronounced it a really original idea.

An old family friend of mine, Dr. Lucraft, happened to be passing through London at the time, and I secured him for my party, not because I expected to profit by his society, but in order that he should talk to the Professor. The latter appeared with his wife, in fair average spirits; but I could see that the needle of his barometer stood delicately poised at Change.

The two men had much in common, and I talked to them together, until they were fairly started on old Continental churches. Then I looked after Rhoda. She was diligently talking to Mrs. Minton, but I could see the flush of suppressed excitement on her cheeks, matching the June rose which she wore in the same white dress; and I knew that the MS. was waiting its time in her pocket. Archibald was hanging about, throwing bread to the minnows. I requested Mr. Merton to do the honours of his island and my strawberries to Mrs. Minton, and then sent Archibald in one of the pleasure-boats with Rhoda.

I was not surprised to see that he rowed for some distance up the river, instead of landing; but I was a little provoked that—between the row and the strawberries—he detained Rhoda for fully three-quarters of an hour. The Professor and Dr. Lucraft sauntered up to me, and then the latter plunged into inquiries after my sisters and cousins and aunts. I had to give him my attention, and enjoyed the familiar gossip; but I was not quite easy about the Professor. I do

not know what became of him, but I suppose he felt neglected, and grew bored; at any rate, when I met him again later, after Rhoda had returned, he looked decidedly cross. She had joined him at once, but his skies were cloudy; he declared himself not up to tennis, and they soon took leave. I perceived breakers ahead, and wished the great book in the hands of the Caliph Omar.

However, here it was, and had to be copied. Next week, the chapter on "Climate and Soil" was our pièce de résistance. Rhoda came in from time to time, and worked diligently, and the quantity she accomplished was marvellous. The chapter was finished on Friday, and despatched to Archibald by post.

Saturday was a blank day. The weather broke the evening before, and the day was thoroughly and hopelessly wet. I felt grateful to it for not being uncertain, and sat quietly indoors, and copied a page or two of "Personal Adventures." My feelings fluctuated about the Magnum Opus; sometimes I looked upon it as an Old Man of the Sea, but on the whole I was growing much interested in it. When the subject was anything which I could understand, I admired the thoroughness and grasp of the author's mind; the style was admirable, and there were beautiful bits of description. The "Personal Adventures" were capitally told, and altogether my opinion of Professor Lingard was rising.

Rhoda ran in, waterproofed, while I was thus employed. "You good creature," she cried, kissing me, "you do toil at that copying as if it were for yourself. I told Edwin that I must come in and see in what state you were, for fear some dreadful bore should have inflicted his or herself upon you, and you needed help. In reality, of course I wanted a chance to write. I am afraid he thought me unkind to leave him, so I must not stay long, or waste time in talking."

"Is he well to-day?"

"Oh yes; at least, I don't know that he is ill. But he has been a good deal out of sorts lately; somehow, I fancy that he feels something in the air—he is so sensitive. Oh! I wish this job were done; I cannot bear not telling him what I am at—I feel as if I were being strangled with cobwebs."

I read a good deal between the lines of this speech; but she took to copying with feverish energy, and we had no more talk. At half-past four she rose to go, and would not be induced to stay for tea.

"No, Vera, I don't like leaving him alone any longer. If you felt courageous enough to make a rush through the rain, I could promise you a cup of mine, and you would be doing a good action."

I felt some curiosity to see the state of affairs at Cyprus Lawn; so I enveloped myself in waterproof and goloshes, and was soon in Rhoda's pretty little drawing-room. The Professor was writing letters—a rare occupation for him; he rose and shook hands in somewhat cloudy fashion.

"After all, no bores attacked Vera but myself," Rhoda reported, "so here I am back again."

"I did not expect you so soon," he replied, coldly; "I knew you would find pleasant company at Mrs. Singleton's."

"I have induced Mrs. Singleton to bring her pleasant company in here, you see," she rejoined, with persistent cheerfulness; "and now I am going to make her as good a cup of tea as she gives us."

"I never drink tea," responded her husband, sourly.

"That is a pity," I said; "for your wife makes it better than anyone I know, and she never will tell me where she gets it."

"I must keep the monopoly of my one domestic success," laughed Rhoda.

"It is an unexpected pleasure to me to learn that our house can offer any attraction to Mrs. Singleton, comparable with those which hers possesses for—us," said the Professor, with pointed ill-temper.

"Oh, I don't much believe in its fascinations," I said hurriedly, discomposed by the growing embarrassment of the situation. "I fancy my strawberries and cream are the most attractive things."

"They are: *very* attractive," he answered, with intensified bitterness.

Could I have said a worse thing? I bit my lip savagely in pure anger at my own blundering, and sat in stupid silence. Rhoda's pretty eyebrows rose with a pained wrinkle, but the entrance of the servant with the tea-tray made a slight break. The Professor seemed somewhat ashamed of himself, and handed me my cup of tea and all belonging thereto with assiduous politeness. Rhoda's eyebrows went down, and as he returned to his chair near the table she touched his cheek with a caressing gesture. He caught her hand, kissed it passionately, and looked up into her eyes as if he would search her through and through. She flushed at the sudden action, but stooped and gently kissed his forehead. The kiss subdued him; he let go her hand, and dropped back into his chair, where he sat very quiet for the rest of my visit, occasionally adding a remark to our chat. I did not stay longer than I could help; for I was sure that the moment I was gone Rhoda would slip down on her knees beside his chair, and he would throw his arms round her, and the demon would be exorcised for this while.

But would it stay away? For it was now clear to me that Professor Lingard believed—or thought that he believed—that his wife had persisted in going to my house this wet afternoon in order to meet Archibald. It would never occur to her that such an idea could have entered his mind, and he would never say it to her, and so the delusion would not be removed. If only I had seen it sooner, I might so easily have made all clear. Perhaps I might yet have an opportunity; but to show the Professor that I perceived his suspicions would be to fix them more firmly in his mind, as he would suppose that at least I saw grounds for them. Oh, what a mess I had made of this after

noon's work! A nice person I was to have in my hands threads wound round other people's hearts!

"Vera Singleton," I summed up, "you are a meddling old mischief-maker!"

IV.

THE rainy spell exhausted itself within the week, and was followed by splendid summer heat. The earth was intoxicated with roses and sunlight, and July reigned in glory.

"Aunt," said Archie solemnly, as he stood by me under the great horse-chestnut; "nobody ought to want to be amused on such a day as this; it ought to be enough for them to be alive."

"And yet, in half an hour, these paltry mortals will be making themselves very hot playing tennis, and seeking solace, not in nature, but in ices."

"Playing tennis to-day is profane," he replied; "I will not countenance it. This is one of Nature's Sundays, and should be observed with due solemnity, and grave rites of joy."

"You have borrowed one of Professor Lingard's moods," I answered, laughing. "I never heard you talk so like him before."

"Would you know the reason why? I expect soon to be his bosom friend and mentor. I've got jolly good news for him, at any rate," returned Archibald, excitedly.

"Have you? Oh, what?"

"You don't suppose I am going to give you the first of it, auntie? No; I will only uncork it for whom it concerns."

"The Professor?"

"Heavens, no! He's a great deal too kittle cattle for me to drive to market; Mrs. Lingard must manage him her own way. I shall tell her; and if her grey eyes don't give that wonderful sudden sparkle, like a flash of sunlight on a mountain pool—why, I shall have missed a pretty effect, that's all. So we'll have another row on the river."

"No, Archie; I can't have all the gossips' tongues of Tamston set wagging by more aquatic expeditions of indefinite duration. If you want the pleasure of telling your news yourself, you must sacrifice something for it. People are to come straight out to the lawn, and will not go through the drawing-room; do you take a book, and sit there quietly, and when I have an opportunity, I will bring Rhoda in. Then you can say whatever has to be said, without attracting notice."

So Archie was established in seclusion; and I prepared to be very diplomatic, and bring this little intrigue—now so near its culminating point—to a happy ending. Everything promised well. The Lingards arrived rather late, when I had disposed of most of my guests, and was at leisure to attend to them. One of Rhoda's

peculiarities was to dislike varieties in dress; having a white cashmere which was suitable for an afternoon party, she saw no occasion for making any change, simply because she had worn it before. Only as the season varied, so did her flowers; and thus her dress carried out that union of repose and variety, which was one of her personal charms. To-day she had ventured on a profusion of roses, in harmony with the sumptuous weather; white, pink, crimson, and yellow—they decked her hat, and twined round her neck, and rested on her bosom; one gorgeous red rose even looped up a fold of her dress. I had never seen her look prettier or livelier, and yet I was not quite satisfied. There seemed something uneasy in the rich flush on her usually delicate cheek, and the brilliancy of her soft eyes, and she watched her husband even more anxiously than usual. He seemed in high spirits, and had brought his racquet, talked and laughed with wonderful animation, and professed himself indifferent to the heat, and longing for a game. It was not very long before he was taking part in one, and Rhoda and I stood and watched the play for a little, until he seemed thoroughly absorbed in it. Nevertheless, I could not divest myself of an uneasy feeling that something was wrong with him, and that Rhoda felt it.

We walked round the garden together, and I told her that Archie had brought her good news, but that he would not tell it to anyone but herself.

"So I have arranged for you to have your talk in the drawing-room, where you will be cool and undisturbed—for you look flushed already, dear."

"Good news! Oh Vera, is it? I am so glad, so thankful; I felt that something was going to happen to-day. Good news! is it really? Oh, how long it is since we have had any!"

She hurried into the drawing-room; but controlled herself, and met Archie with nearly her usual composure. I closed half the window-door after me as I came in, and passed through into the conservatory. Here I worked myself all the year round, and made pets of my flowers and ferns. The latter had an abode of their own, at the further end, a little shady nook, built out from it, with rock-work, and a miniature arch, and a drip of water in its tiny caves. At the same end was a door into the garden, through which I meant to rejoin my guests, without going back into the drawing-room; but first I stepped into the fernery, to remove a shade from my beloved Killarney fern. When the drawing-room should be vacated, I meant to bring up Lady Jacobs to admire its progress.

Just as I was arranging this, I heard a quick but stealthy step on the gravel outside, and in a moment Professor Lingard entered the conservatory, treading quietly in his tennis-shoes. At once he heard the sound of his wife and Archibald's voices inside, and his face changed from eager watchfulness to something demoniac. Three or four cat-like strides brought him to the door into the drawing-room

and he crouched down behind it as it stood open, perfectly concealed from the two within. My position was not pleasant. I had been too utterly taken by surprise to stop him in time, and now I could not move without letting him know that he was discovered, and discovering him to Archibald and Rhoda. A nice trap we were all caught in! Those two blissfully ignorant that the Professor was watching them; the Professor never dreaming that I was watching him; and I, the arch-intriguer, not wishing in the least to watch anybody, and yet standing in my Ear of Dionysius, and watching them all. For, by one of those unaccountable accidents which sometimes happen in building, and which our architects seem quite unable to account for or control, the little recess in which I was imprisoned caught every sound from the drawing-room with singular distinctness; and although neither voice was high-pitched, I could hear every word.

"I am afraid," Archie was saying, "that you have thought me slow in doing what I could for your husband's book; but my time is not altogether at my own disposal, and other people's time is not at all, and so the affair has taken what must have seemed to you a long while."

"Of course I could not help being anxious to hear," Rhoda replied; "but I have had enough experience of delays with editors and publishers only to wonder that you have been able to do anything so soon. What is it that you have done?"

"I took the chapter on 'Antiquities' to 'The Archæologist,' and asked the editor (whom I know very well) to look it over as soon as possible. Unluckily, he was just going away for a week, which caused a delay, or you would have had some news sooner. Well, he says it is extremely valuable, erudite, and well-written." (The Professor lifted his head, and I was sure from the expression even of the back of it, that the demoniac look had gone off his face.) "He could not make room for it all, because his paper is not a large one; but he has marked the paragraphs he considers most important, and if he can have those put into the form of two short articles he will gladly publish them."

"Oh, that *is* good," cried Rhoda; "it is the lifting of the cloud!"

"There's more to come," said Archie, triumphantly. "I took 'Climate and Soil' to the 'English Review'—that's a big, new quarterly, you know—and he regularly jumped at it. It will only want just a head and a tail to make it a perfect article for him; it can't be too solid. The bits of description work in splendidly, and keep it from being heavy. He'll want it by the beginning of August. And 'Personal Adventures' will do for my magazine first-rate, if the Professor doesn't mind my editing them a little. They are just a little longer than I can manage, and yet I don't want to lose any of them."

"I don't know how to thank you," Rhoda said, her voice trembling with pleasure. "I can hardly believe such good news, because I had

quite given the whole business up as hopeless; but I always was sure that my husband's work needed only to be known to be appreciated."

"Yes; it is nonsense to think, as amateurs generally do, that introductions or influence are any good for selling stuff that is not worth buying. Professor Lingard's information is most valuable, and his style is excellent; if they had not been what they are, I might have hawked them about for months, and done no good. And if he had sent them in on his own account to the same papers they would have done just as well, only there might have been more delay."

"And yet we failed when we did try."

"Because you did not try the right people, or at the right time. If now, when all these articles have appeared (and I dare say one or two more may be quarried out yet), Professor Lingard will take up his book again, and condense it into moderate dimensions, I expect he will find that the publishers will look at it in a very different fashion. They will have some guarantees for its success, and it will succeed."

"Oh, if it did, I should have nothing left to wish for. But I am sure it will. Now I shall be able to tell my husband all this good news, and it will cheer him up so. It has been a terrible weight on my mind to have this secret from him; I never had one before. Don't *you* set up secrets when you are married," she ended, with a gay laugh.

"When I am married!" echoed Archie bitterly: "I begin to think I am destined to single cynicism. If so, I shall throw up my present work and go on to the 'Saturday Review.'"

"I hope you will not need to commit that kind of suicide," said Rhoda, with gentle gravity. "I trust to see you some day as happy as I am now. I am sure you, who are so ready to help others, deserve to prosper yourself."

"I don't know what I deserve," Archie answered, with a gloom very unlike him; "I only know that I have been and fallen in love with the sweetest girl in London, and there is about as much chance of my marrying her as ——"

"As there seemed last month of my husband's book being published," laughed Rhoda. "No, you shall not despair; you scolded me for doing so, and now I will scold you. I feel flooded with hope and joy; I am floating on it, and I will take you into my boat. Come out, and let us find Edwin; I am wild to tell him, and then he must talk to you; you scarcely know each other."

"I hope he will not think me an impertinent meddler, for proposing to cut his book to pieces. Otherwise, I shall be very pleased to improve his acquaintance."

"He will be as grateful to you as I am. Now that you know him partly through his writings, you will be better able to appreciate him than after months of mere social meetings. And I want him to be appreciated. No one really knows what he is and could do but I."

As she spoke, they were moving out to the lawn, and their foot-

steps were lost on the grass. Then I heard a sob. The Professor had hidden his face in his hands. His punishment had come upon him, and the coals of fire were very hot upon his head.

I could scarcely find it in my heart to pity him. How could he for a moment have distrusted that pure heart, beating close to his own for five years? How could he have received her daily tenderness, and still nourished that whispering snake in his soul? Did he not deserve to have meanly spied upon her, only to learn more of the depths of her devotion?

There was silence, in which I softened, as I thought that it was the very sense of all this which was crushing him now, and that at any rate he had suffered worse pain than he had inflicted. Presently he stood up, and went into the drawing-room, almost staggering, and I heard him sink into a chair. This was my opportunity. In my dread of being discovered, I took off my shoes, and succeeded in slipping out and round the corner of the house without making any noise—though not without hurting my feet horribly. I made a détour and entered the drawing-room by the window, making my steps heard first.

"Why, Professor! You are not well, I am sorry to see."

He looked up with a dazed air. "No, I am not well, thank you. Oh yes, I am all right now. Where is my wife?"

"She is looking for you, I think. But do sit still for the present, or lie down. The heat has been too much for you."

"Thank you, I would rather go home, if you will tell me where to find her." He stood up, but had to steady himself by the arm of the chair.

"I will find her for you presently," I said. The one thing that I was anxious about now was to prevent an outpouring of penitence to Rhoda. She would forgive him anything, but she was too proud and sensitive ever to be able to forget that she had been doubted.

"Do sit down here quietly in the cool," I resumed, "and let me wait to fetch her until you are more yourself. She will be alarmed if she sees you in this state."

"She will not be alarmed; I cannot wait. I must see her: I want to tell her——"

"You do not want to tell her anything that will distress her, I hope," I said severely.

He was silent.

"Rhoda is very strong and loving," I went on, "but she is very sensitive. Because she can bear pain, you think that she does not feel it. Something has been troubling her for these last three weeks, and I have been grieved to see that it was so."

"Has she been troubled?" he interrupted, eagerly. "Have I given her pain?"

"Something has given her great pain, Professor Lingard; you best know what. She has not told me."

"It is I," he said, brokenly, sitting down again. "I: nobody else."

"If it is so, will you not refrain from hurting her more?"

"I never will—never again. My own true, loving darling!"

"Then you must be silent and self-controlled now. If you pour out your feelings to Rhoda, you will give her a wound from which she may never recover. She has no suspicion of the wrong that your thoughts have done her; she never must suspect it, or you will insult her afresh."

There was a long pause, and then he answered: "You are quite right, Mrs. Singleton; I will take your advice. Now, if you please, I will look for my wife." He spoke in a composed and manly tone, and stood up again.

Just then Rhoda rushed in, alone.

"I have been looking for you everywhere, Edwin, and then I heard that you had been unwell, and given up your game, so I guessed you were indoors. One of your dreadful headaches, I see. Poor dear! is it very bad?"

She knelt beside him, and placed one hand on his forehead. He seemed unable to speak, but put his arm round her, and rested his head on her shoulder. She laid her cheek softly upon his hot forehead. The Professor's eyes were closed, but I saw two tears steal from under their lids.

I slipped quietly away.

V.

THERE is not much more to tell. After that day, everything went on with smoothness. Professor Lingard called upon Archibald in due form on Monday, the latter having honoured me with an additional day's visit, in order to "see the thing through." I was not present at the interview, thinking it better to keep out of the Professor's way just then; but it went off well. He thanked Archibald with all the graceful courtesy which he could so easily command, and entered into the discussion of details in a practical and business-like manner. So, at least, I gathered, as my nephew pronounced him a far more sensible fellow than he had thought, and a thorough gentleman.

In process of time all the articles came out, as well as another upon the Cypriotes themselves, and their various characteristics. It was delightful to see how the Lingards flourished on their small successes. The Professor seemed to grow taller and carry himself straighter with every time that he saw his name in print; he was always busy now, preparing something for the press, and had no time to be unwell. Archibald put it into a well-known publisher's head to bring out a Handy Book on Cyprus; and the Professor, whose spirits were rising high, actually went himself to interview the great man, and offer to write it. In spite of Archie's declarations of the uselessness of influence, I am pretty sure that he exerted a little; at

any rate, the Professor got the work, and did it well and rapidly. His name was now known in connection with the subject, and he ventured to take up once more the great book itself. Being by this time well accustomed to cutting and fitting, he reduced it to reasonable dimensions without (I believe) unbearable pangs; and it actually made its appearance. He did not make much by it, I think; but it got some good reviews, had a fair sale, and brought him in something. He and Rhoda cared little about the money; they were perfectly happy to see it in print, and know that it was read.

All this literary work extended Professor Lingard's connections, and increased his acquaintances; so that he did not become a monomaniac about Cyprus, but took up other subjects, and did other classes of work. He never relapsed into his old, dispirited condition; and though he did not accomplish anything very great, or reach any extended fame, he became in his quiet way a distinguished man, who never undertook what he could not do, did well whatever he undertook, and was highly thought of in a small circle.

Rhoda bloomed out into redoubled beauty, and for the first time I saw what she was like when not under a cloud. I did not wonder at the Professor's having fallen helplessly in love with her. He is more in love with her than ever now, I think; especially since, having got the Magnum Opus off her mind, she has had time to turn her attention to perpetuating the name of Lingard in other ways. He spends half his time in contemplating the Result in its cradle, and writing poetry about it; but when out of that safe retreat, he is desperately afraid of it.

Archibald is Baby's godfather, and is always a welcome guest at Cyprus Lawn. I am godmother, and am curiously fond of the queer little atom; but I make my visits when the Professor is likely to be safe in his study. For, although he is always studiously polite to me, our friendship has cooled since that memorable Saturday in July. I know that the sight of me reminds him of the one episode in his life of which he is bitterly ashamed, and which he would forget if he could. I can easily forgive him, and was not surprised that he did not care that summer to come to any more of my Saturdays. But he always sent his wife, when he could induce her to leave him, especially when Archibald was to be there.

VERA SINGLETON.

IN THE CLOISTER.

In the old monastic garden,
Where the shadows come and go,
Pace, in holy meditation,
Sandalled brothers to and fro.

'Twixt the rows of sunflowers, leaning
To their god each burning heart,
Past sweet herb and shrub, revealing
Token of the healing art.

Some in lofty contemplation,
Watch the sunset colours red,
Over breviary and missal,
Bendeth many a cowled head.

Abbey walls shut out the tumult
Of the world—its strife and din;
Passionless and even beateth
Heart and pulse those walls within.

When the ponderous gates closed on them,
Human life was left without,
Human love and human feeling,
Memory—all were blotted out.

So at least the Church has willed it,
But the heart is stronger still,
And hath deeper needs implanted
Than her narrow creed can fill.

See the monk through yonder grating,
In his solitary cell,
Lifting yearning prayers to Heaven;
All his troubles who can tell?

Was it then for this, O Father,
Orphaned, desolate to be,
That I gave up Love, Home, Beauty?
Yet I feel no nearer Thee.

Here in cloistered cell I thought me
Heaven to find, and Peace and Rest;
But here, too, hath sin dominion,
And a home in monkish breast.

Softly through the gathering twilight
Rings the Angelus to prayer,
And an Angel's wing, in passing,
Seems to stir the dusky air.

Through the chapel windows streaming
Floods of music drown his soul;
Holy chant and swelling anthem
Make the wounded spirit whole.

"Come, O come, ye heavy laden,"
'Tis to thee, poor monk, addressed;
"Come," ring on ye seraph voices—
"Come, and I will give you rest."

E. L.

IN THE BLACK FOREST.

By Charles W. Wood, Author of "Through Holland," "Round About Norway," &c.

THE Rhine Falls were left to astonish other eyes and ears with their rush and roar, and once more I was journeying towards the Black Forest, taking a long round, and making yet another violent effort to see the Wehrathal. Success would depend very much upon the elements, but come fair weather or come foul, I had determined to see this much-praised valley. A rash resolve.

The train made its slow way to Basle; how slow and how wearisome only those know who have passed through the experience. Travelling for pleasure, these frequent stoppages and long halts are endurable; but to anyone hastening on matters of life or death all this delay and loss of time must be torture.

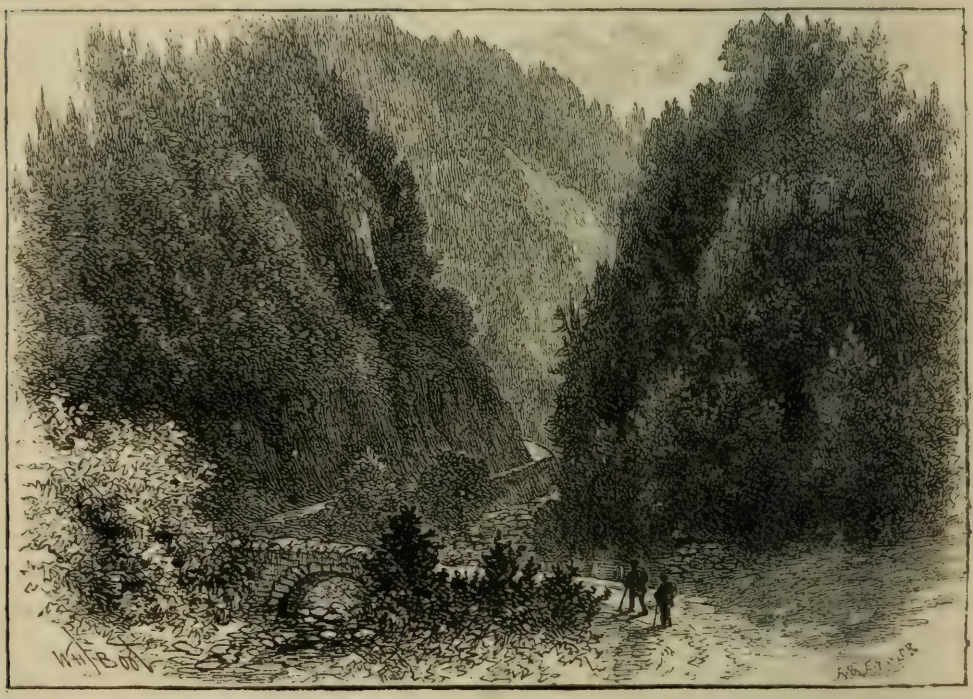
At Basle we changed for the Black Forest. The train was crowded, and passengers were packed together regardless of class: not the most comfortable arrangement in the world. The summer manœuvres were going forward, and every station was thronged with noisy Germans. Countrymen dressed in their Sunday best, and looking stiff and uncomfortable; half of them carrying glaring umbrellas tied round like lettuces. They scrambled, any number into any carriage, and the train groaned with its extra weight. The day was intensely hot and bright, but I had learned wisdom of late, and did not expect too much. There is no mesmerism in these matters. It is said that to wish for a person will often bring him, but it is not so with blue skies.

We reached Schopfheim, a small, industrious manufacturing town. Here I was glad to say good-bye to the train, which continued its slow way towards Zell, another industrious manufacturing town, overshadowed by the mountains. Zell was nearer my destination, but a fellow traveller (above the Sunday-best and cotton-umbrella order) said there would be greater chance of finding a carriage for Schönau at Schopfheim than at Zell.

So I alighted; and the guard, more civil and human than the Schluchsee diligence-conductor had been to the unprotected lady travelling to Höchenschwand, put out my luggage at Schopfheim, though it was labelled for Zell. Next, my fellow traveller piloted me through the not very intricate mazes leading from the station to the inn of the Three Kings, where he seemed quite at home. In a moment the host and hostess bustled out with effusion (they were honest, straightforward folk), and assured me that a horse and carriage, everything the inn contained, was at my disposal.

After this wholesale invitation, it seemed almost ungrateful merely to accept a glass of their country ale and a crust of bread; certainly it was unremunerative; but I am bound to say that an extensive order for ambrosia and nectar could not have been served with more evidence of goodwill. Whilst the carriage was preparing, I strolled out to reconnoitre the town and take its bearings.

It contained nothing remarkable. A small, uninteresting place, of no form or shape; no sign of fashion, or of anything beyond trade and very small commerce; nothing old or antiquated about it, except the distant hills; too distant to overshadow the houses or lend them anything of a romantic influence. In a quiet way the



WEHRATHAL.

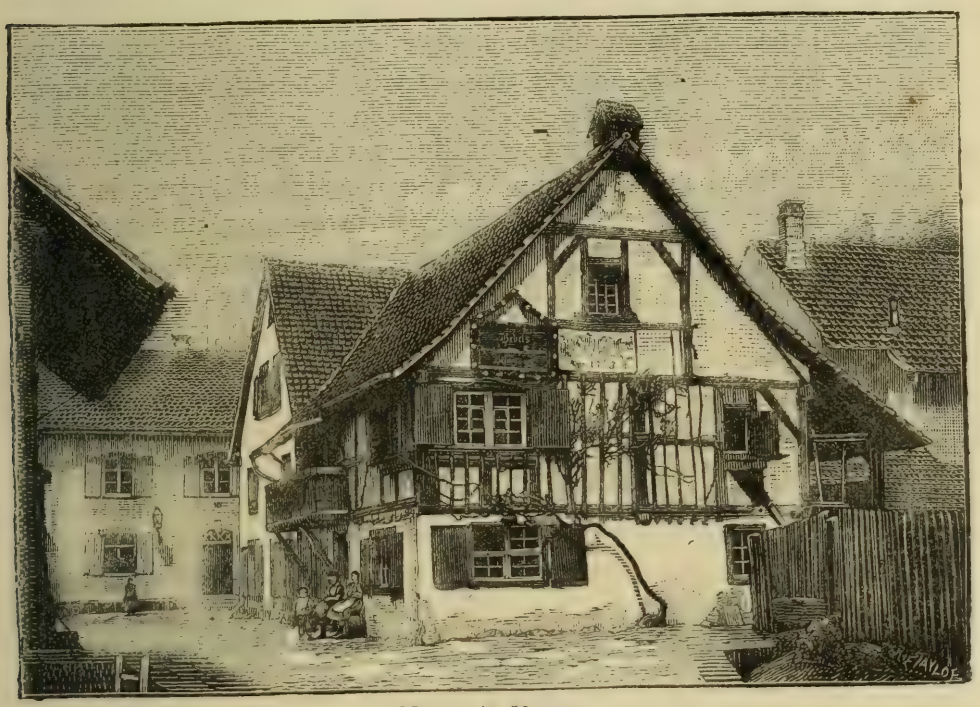
people appeared flourishing and industrious. There were no conspicuous signs of poverty; for the bare-legged children, who played in the gutters, and arrested their intense enjoyment of wallowing in the dust of the road to stare after the stranger, were no evidence of anything but the good habits of the country: bare legs and feet and arms, whereby they grow up stout and hardy for the battle of the world.

Before the mild excitement and resources of Schopfheim were exhausted, I perceived at the door of the Three Kings an indescribable vehicle in readiness. The landlord, a model of patience and good humour, was watching over it with evident pride and affection.

On closer inspection, this wonderful machine proved a kind of Bath chair on a large scale, with a narrow seat in front for the driver and a ledge behind for the luggage. But it was not uncomfortable;

and if the state of the springs made it a matter for rejoicing that one's bones are not very easily dislocated, still things might have been worse. The wheels, at least, were round and not square. With the aid of the shaggy but willing quadruped we should gradually make way, and sooner or later reach Schönau.

So it came to pass. The landlord, with a sort of paternal solicitude, packed me up bag and baggage, gave a proud and parting look to his vehicle and his little horse, wished me a safe journey (I thought I here detected a slight anxiety in his tone, but probably it was fancy), and away we started. The majesty of Phaeton driving his chariot was nothing as compared with our pomp and pride on this



HEBEL'S HOME.

occasion. Nevertheless, I cannot say that we dashed through the town at headlong speed, scattering people and raising an alarm. The horse, on the contrary, seemed particularly gentle. Moreover, he had distinguished ideas, and felt that a leisurely pace was due to his dignity, and that nothing was more vulgar than to be seen in a hurry. If ever he had had a youth, it must certainly have been in the Middle Ages.

But the evening was unusually fine, and our time was our own—carriage, horse, driver, and driven: a quartette accountable to no man. Jehu, too, enlivened the journey with intelligent remarks. His wonders about England, and what it could be like; the great city of London with its millions of people—and was it true that its streets were paved with gold? The anecdotes and histories of his own immediate neighbourhood and its inhabitants, himself included.

He, poor fellow, had come down in the world. He had been a gentleman's coachman for many years; had saved a good bit of money. Then, marrying a wife, he thought he should like a home of his own, and with his savings set up a café. Alas, he had forgotten that a cobbler should stick to his last, or else he had not seized his fortune at the flood, for in two years all was lost. So he had returned to his old occupation, and had come down to the stables of the Three Kings. He had not much hope left for himself, he plaintively said, but he had great hopes that his son would do something in the world, and build up their fortunes once more.

It was a pleasant country drive, calm and placid, nothing wild or great or grand about it. Fields and vineyards and lovely orchards surrounded us. The mountains were gradually drawing nearer. Presently we turned out of our road to visit Hausen, a small village, and the home of Hebel, the poet; who, in a lesser degree, was to the people of the Black Forest what Burns was to the Scotch.

This visit left behind it one of the pleasantest impressions the Black Forest gave me. It was a bright, calm evening, and especially calm and silent was the village. A quaint corner house, nothing more than a humble cottage, bore an inscription intimating that here for a time had been the poet's home. Across the road was the small church, and under its shadow, and guarded by trees, was a monument erected by the people to the poet's memory.

Standing there, this still evening, it all seemed a type of Hebel's life. The quiet fields and fruit-laden orchards; the grand, surrounding hills in which he often wandered, and from which he must have drawn much of his inspiration; the running stream on whose borders he would lounge and dream away the hours, and write down his songs as they occurred to him.

It was just the spot for a poet whose tone of mind was calm and smooth-flowing, rather than wild and passionate. And yet, during the time that he lived amongst poor and, comparatively speaking, ignorant villagers, there must have been for ever in his life an undercurrent of sadness—a feeling of being very much alone in the world; incapable of being understood and appreciated by his nearest and closest companions; a constant craving for communion with a higher order of intelligence and culture, a more elevated social sphere, where the thoughts within him, that had now to be suppressed, might find utterance and response; a reciprocity of ideas and emotions and intimate companionship that is all in all to some natures, and without which life would have no sunshine.

It was doubtless this feeling that made him spend so much of his time wandering about the hills, in silent communion with the Nature he loved so well. Here, at least, there was nothing to jar upon him; nothing to wound his sensitive spirit; no rough response where the opposite should have been; no loud laugh where sympathy was demanded.

We left Hausen to its repose, and went on our way. Soon we passed through Zell, a small, old-fashioned, out-of-the-world spot, with a few tall chimnies and iron works. I thought I had done well to leave the train at Schopfheim and secure a carriage (such a carriage, too!) at the Three Kings. Here, in the valley of the Wiesen, we found ourselves very much amongst the mountains. To the left ran the narrow, shallow babbling stream. The road now presented the usual Black Forest features. Sloping hills breaking into chains; dark pine woods; well made but desolate roads; few signs of life, except occasional wayside inns or houses. When night was beginning to fall, the mountains closed in and the valley narrowed. The stream rushed on more turbulently, as if angry at having its space contracted; the scene grew somewhat wild and grand; two or three houses opened up, with windows already lighted, as if to greet us; yet a little further, and Schönau, reposing in a hollow and surrounded by mountains, was reached.

The inn was primitive, but the landlord was intelligent, and spoke excellent French—a somewhat rare occurrence in the more remote spots of the Black Forest. I gathered from his conversation that he had been born to better things. The rooms were large and well furnished, and it was all much better than could have been expected up amongst the mountains.

For it seemed very much out of the world indeed. Yet it was so beautifully situated, with all the surrounding hills sloping about—under the very shadow of the great Belchen itself—that I felt one could be happy here for a whole week, exploring the neighbourhood. It abounds in mountain excursions; in walks where hour after hour you may lose yourself in the woods in mazes of wild tangle, flowers and briar; in paths and roads untrodden by the ordinary tourist, and delightfully secluded, where the sense of freedom and beauty is revelled in to the very utmost. For it is something to wander out of the beaten track. You gain, in a minor degree, that feeling of exploration, of separation from the world and mankind, from the postman and the immediate neighbour, that must form one of the great charms of the prairies of the New World.

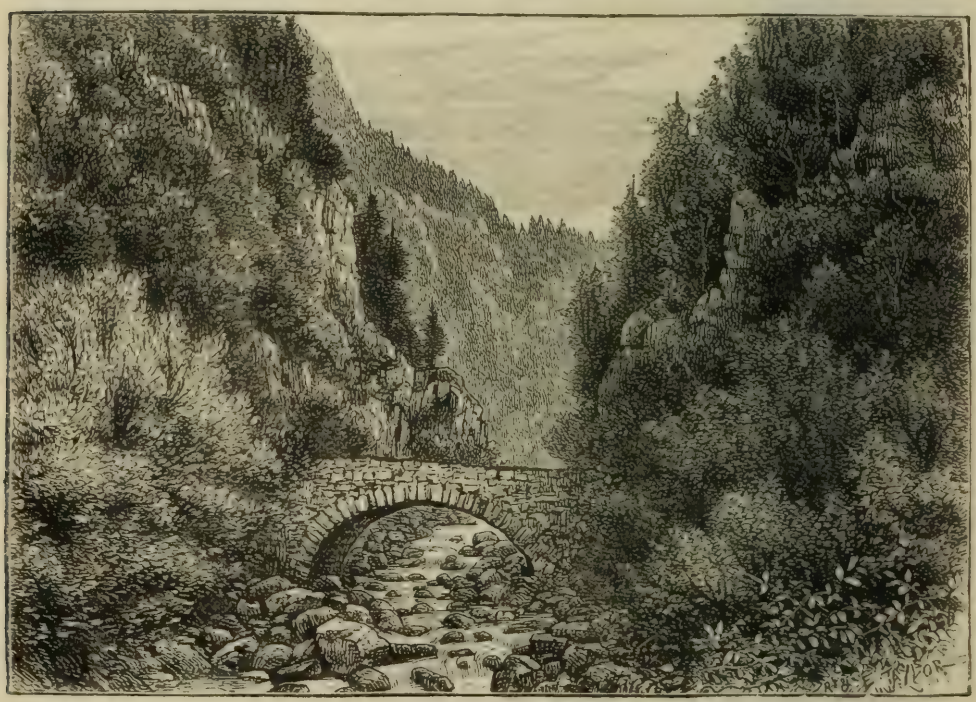
In the twilight I wandered up amongst the mountains, which looked so desolate they might have led to the ends of the earth. Down a mountain path there came a cluster of young men and women, returning from their day's work, singing choruses that made the hills ring again to the echo. The gathering gloom warned me that I also should do well to return. It would be no hard matter to miss one's way up here; and a night in the mountain would be neither comfortable nor agreeable.

Schönau itself is a small but not altogether unimportant place. Wandering about it that night, the streets totally unlighted, it looked weird and uncanny. Some of the thoroughfares were composed entirely of cottages, that, in the darkness, seemed black and broken

with age. Streets of deserted ruins, perfect wrecks they looked, neither light nor sound to be seen or heard. Evidently the people of Schönau were early folk.

On returning to the inn, the landlord said it was the night on which their musical club assembled. He was afraid the sweet sounds might nevertheless prove a discordant element to slumbers, as they might be kept up rather late. My room was just over the music room—should he put me a floor higher? But in this primitive place surely all sounds, musical or otherwise, would cease by eleven o'clock, and I decided to stay where I was.

I had reckoned without my host. The moments passed, but not



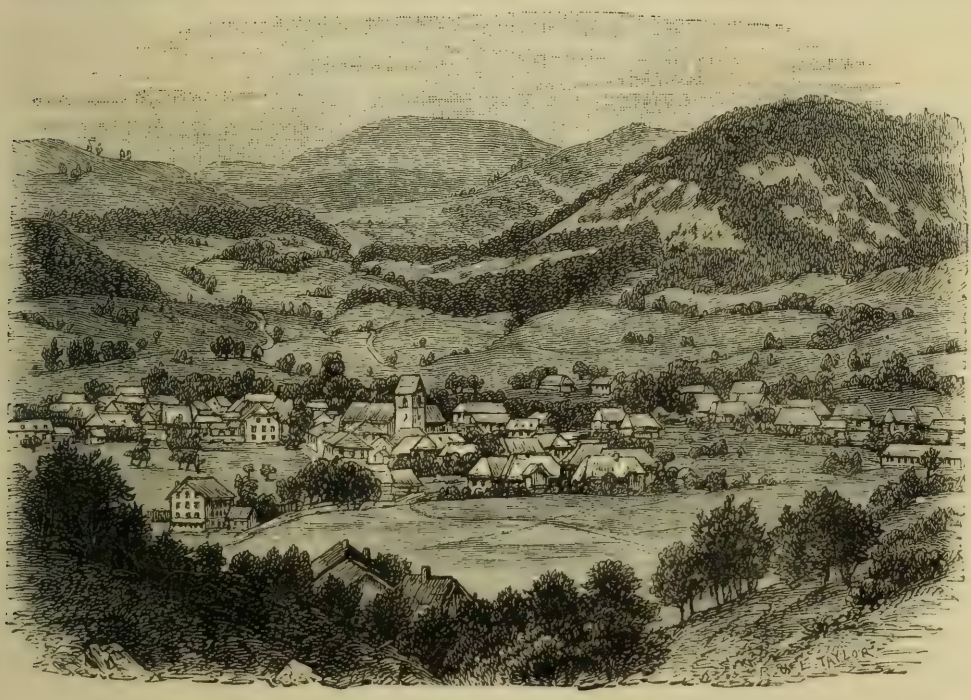
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the music. To do them justice, it was an excellent performance. The president, who alone touched the piano, went through some of Wagner's most difficult compositions with the skill of a master. When not playing a solo, he was accompanying the others in part-songs, well sung, certainly, but putting an end to all repose. If I could by any possibility have hated music it would have been that night. Most devoutly I wished that St. Cecilia, reversing the order of things, would strike the lyre and draw all these angels upwards.

Until between two and three in the morning the performance never ceased. Then the piano was shut down with a determined hand, and the "Gesellschaft" drifted out into the night. I saw them file off in ones, like a string of musical turkeys—for I had long since sought my window in despair, and watched for St. Cecilia amongst the stars. The house was left to peace and quietness. But

of what use, now that the dawn in faintest glimmer was creeping up into the eastern sky? The "Gesellschaft" might as well have gone on discoursing sweet sounds until breakfast, for sleep and rest had taken flight.

The next morning the landlord apologised for the lateness of the performance. Never was apology less out of place. But he explained that one of the company (the player who had so charmed me in spite of all) was going away on a long absence—perhaps even for ever. Why, in the name of wonder, could mine host not have given me this information last night? Irritated nerves would have been soothed, excuses made. I would even have sat up and taken part in these



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"midnight orgies," and joined in their harmonies; in the end have passed round the loving cup and speeded the parting guest. No; things are left unsaid; explanations are not forthcoming; and it is all the fault of stupid people who will not speak at the right moment. The rough, that might have been so smooth, remains rough; the crooked is never made straight. All for the want of a few words in the right place. Verily, we miss our opportunities and live our lives as if they were all to come twice over; not as if each passing sunset brought us nearer that day when the pulse must cease to beat, the heart, with all its emotions, must be stilled for ever.

That morning, when the faint dawn in the east had given place to broad day, I found my way to the breakfast-room and to the apologies of mine host. What could be said in return? Only that the next night I would accept his offer and ascend a stage in the world.

Before eight o'clock a carriage, with as strong and brisk a pair of horses as I had seen in the Black Forest, stood at the door. And here I would counsel the reader to take, on all possible occasions, in this district, a small carriage where a large one is not needed. It is more agreeable; you travel more quickly; as a rule the springs are in better condition and dislocation is less imminent; and, strongest consideration of all, it saves the horses.

I started for the Wehrathal. This time at least it should be done; it remained to be proved whether it would be seen also. The morning was not promising. It did not rain, but the clouds were low and threatening.

It was a lovely drive, and with sunshine would have been perfect. The road to begin with was steep and rugged; a sharp ascent between low, green hills, with higher hills beyond. Then we descended and followed the course of the stream, whose banks were overshadowed by small trees; banks lined with such a wealth of moss and wild flowers and delicate ferns, that in gathering specimens the carriage was for ever running on out of sight. Thus we went on for some time, until we came to a pass on the left leading up to Todtnau, a small place in the mountains, 2,000 feet above the sea level, with manufactories of paper and cotton. Its beauties to-day had to remain unexplored, and we continued our way, reaching presently the village of Todtmoos, with its pilgrim church, all buried in the hills. At the primitive inn we halted awhile to rest the horses; and on leaving it the rain began to fall.

A little below this, at Todtmoos Au, began the greater beauty of the Wehrathal. In full sunshine no doubt it would have proved worthy of all its reputation, but the rain was coming down, and the clouds hung about the mountain tops; white mists that wreathed themselves into fantastic forms, and rolled, snake-like, about the trees, and crept and crawled onwards and upwards, and seemed to gather strength and volume as they went—always a bad sign.

Yet in spite of all, the beauty of the Wehrathal was evident, and beyond doubt. When, every now and then, the clouds lifted and the rain condescended to cease, one saw how grand and lovely it would all be under blue skies. The valley was very narrow; just room enough for the road and the rushing stream; an accumulation of wood and rock and loveliest green. The mountains towered on both sides; here barren, and standing out like the ruins of castles that might have been there since the commencement of the ages, magnificent and hoary; there covered with glorious pines and still more luxuriant verdure to the very summits; trees fringing the sky in delicate, lace-like outlines.

The road wound about the mountains, so that we were constantly opening up fresh views, never seeing very much of the valley at one time; an effect that so greatly increases the magical beauty of scenery. Never to know quite what may come next: a fresh

surprise, a new and delightful sensation at every turn. Now we followed one bank of the stream, and now, crossing an old stone bridge, skirted the other. All the time the water ran and frothed and appeared to sing for joy at its beautiful home; and we seemed to race with it. The willing horses wanted no urging, but with a small carriage and a light weight, fancied themselves out for a holiday, and went careering down the valley at full speed.

But between the Wehrathal and the Albthal (they are often brought into comparison, and each has its supporters), there is this difference: In the Albthal the road runs far up the mountain side. You are elevated and look down constantly from a height more or less considerable. You gaze from deep, precipitous banks into a river running far below at the bottom of the wild pass or ravine. You seem to be above it all, to command all; a sense of wings, of soaring, takes possession of you. There is a great deal of rugged wildness and grandeur. You have far-reaching views of extraordinary beauty; mountain after mountain covered with forest trees; a wealth of wood and verdure, sufficient, one would think, to supply the world with all its needs for the next age to come. The road, running beside the steep, wild precipice, is diversified by tunnels cut out of the solid rock. In spite of so much elevation, still the pine-clad mountains rise towering above you; but here they slope outwards, so that the upper portion of the valley is expansive: only from the road downwards does it contract into a wild ravine.

The Wehrathal, on the other hand, has none of this wild, savage grandeur. There is no looking into great depths, which always gives a far stronger sense of the sublime and the splendid than looking upwards from the depth itself. Here the road is for ever on a level with the stream. The rush of the water is every now and then almost a disturbing element in one's journey. From this depth we gaze up into the wealth of wood and verdure of the mountains that tower and almost meet on the right hand and on the left. They are beautiful exceedingly; but it is a softer beauty than that of the Albthal: the green is not confined exclusively to pine trees. I saw it under every disadvantage; the weather was almost as bad as those three days passed at Wehr in hopeless expectancy. This had to be taken into consideration. But when all due allowance was made, the Albthal seemed infinitely more impressive than the Wehrathal.

Human nature happily embraces every variety of taste and sentiment; the sublime to one mind will be a matter of indifference to another. Therefore, whilst some might prefer the rugged grandeur of the Albthal, others might find greater enjoyment in the gentler influence of the Wehrathal, whose beauties also often touch the sublime point. But though I thought that the two valleys could not be compared, yet undoubtedly the Wehrathal yields the palm only to the Albthal. Both should be seen, and he who neglects either, misses two of the choicest, loveliest spots in the Black Forest.

The little horses made good way, and dashed downwards. We passed out of the valley into more open country, and in a few moments entered the small town of Wehr, where, last week, the little coterie had been weather-bound. Waking the echoes of the quiet street, the people came to their doors and windows, and recognising a familiar face, seemed disposed to greet it as an old friend. But there was something "stagey" in it all. I had disappeared down one end of the place; I reappeared up the other. Who was to guess the long round by road and rail that had led to this species of trap-door sensation? Perseverance surmounts obstacles; but, alas, it evidently would not control the weather.



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Once more at the little Hotel Brügger, out came the landlady with hands uplifted in astonishment at so much perseverance, so little good fortune. But if I would take the trouble to enter, at least if I could not have blue skies I should have a good dinner. It is surprising what a consolation for many ills this appears to be to a large proportion of mankind. To many who serve and to many who are served, a good dinner is the Ultima Thule of existence.

So the hostess set about her work, and put herself on her mettle, which all ended in a very creditable result. And even as blessings, any more than misfortunes, do not come singly, in less than ten minutes from the time of entering the house, the clouds drifted and the sun came out with full power. We should have a fine afternoon, after all, said Frau Brügger; the drive up the Wehrathal would be magnificent. Remembering her false prophecies of last week, I

doubted, and took her present assurance, like her excellent dishes, with a grain of salt.

After a rest of more than two hours, Jehu came round with his equipage, and away we went again; this time bidding a final farewell to Wehr. Once more the sky had clouded; once more, at the very entrance of the valley, down came the rain. There was no other choice than to bear it; no alternative. On we went, this time constantly ascending, and making slow progress. But at length we passed the foundry of Todtmoos Au, and reached Todtmoos itself, with its pilgrim church and primitive inn. Here we were glad enough to escape for an hour's shelter. The driver, like all sensible mortals in like condition, went in for hot coffee and a deep, deep draught, not of rich Rhine wine, but of kirschwasser. For this latter decoction, or distillation, these Black Forest drivers have a capacity as surprising as it is inexhaustible.

At the end of the hour (oh, kindly clouds, how soon we forget the miseries you cause us, the beauties you withhold!) the rain ceased, and we continued on our journey with fresh hopes and aspirations.

And now, to vary our route, we turned off to the left up into the mountains. It was a lovely, desolate way. Here one truly felt in the very heart of the forest. The woods were on each side, and the road seemed merely a clearance cut through them; we could see far into their depths; long, green aisles, thick clumps and clusters; mazes of delicious ferns and flowers, moss and tangle. Up and up we ascended, until at length we found ourselves in the very clouds, then above them, whilst they covered the prospect before us like a sea.

It was a strange sight, an exquisite delusion. But I longed to see the weather clear, so that the whole of this evidently magnificent panorama might stretch out in all its beauty. Open sesame! Even as I longed and wished, like a great scroll the mist rolled rapidly away, and in a distance of some two hundred yards the whole obstructing vapour had been left behind.

The effect was magical. We were now on a level with the tops of the mountains; the climb had been steep and somewhat long. Before us lay an immense panorama of green, smiling valley and verdant, fertile plain, and far-off wooded hills. Villages reposed here and there; streams ran their course. It is one of the most striking and most varied views in the Black Forest. Now we began to descend into the valley; a long pass, steep as the ascent had been. Cows and goats browsed on the hillsides, looking like flies clinging to a wall, mere animated dots in the landscape. Down and down we went; first overhanging the valley, then gradually reaching the level, and leaving the tops of the hills far, far above us. The road was now long and circuitous, shut in by the mountains. We passed wayside villages, small and primitive, where wood-choppers kept time to the sound of the rushing stream. Halted at a wayside inn; ostensibly

to refresh the horses, really to invigorate the driver, who so praised the kirschwasser to the skies, that I was tempted to take the glass humbly handed by the landlord. It was distilled poison.

However, on coachman and horses the short rest and refreshment had the desired effect. They went forward with renewed energy; and, soon after, we launched out upon the Wiesenthal, the road travelled yesterday from Schopfheim.

But the Angenbachthal, now left behind, was certainly one of the most delightful, one of the most primitive and refreshing in the Black Forest. Whether travelling by carriage, or whether on a walking tour, it will equally enchant those who are fortunate enough not to pass it by. To the pedestrian especially it presents attractions, for he may wander into the by-paths at his own sweet will, may lose himself in the mazes of the forest, and luxuriate in all this not only solitary, but comparatively untrodden ground. He will revel in lovely specimens of ferns and flowers, even though it may be but to tread them under foot. And he may hold converse, now and again, with a primitive, simple-minded woodcutter, for whom the world is but a name, the destiny of nations an unknown problem, and the law of progress not even a mystery. And he may dream and dream away the moments, and fancy himself in the Forest Primeval.

(To be concluded.)

"Puisque tu sais chanter, ami, tu sais pleurer."—
ALFRED DE MUSSET.

To me sad moments bring
This heart-thought deep:
"He who knows how to sing
Knows how to weep."

Yet though deep sorrow lies
Upon my breast,
And though these weeping eyes
Not yet may rest;

This other thought as deep
The angels bring:
He who knows how to weep
Knows how to sing.

A. M. H.

UGLY AND STUPID.

By Jane Grey.

"LADY FLORA has a headache, and cannot act to-night! Gracious goodness! What are we to do? The airs these fine ladies give themselves is simply abominable."

The energy with which these words were uttered would have led a listener to suppose that the speaker was a radical merchant from one of the manufacturing towns in the north, instead of being one of the richest, handsomest, idlest, and most universally-petted young men in London, who generally assumed a blasé air of liking nothing, though occasionally, as at the present moment, the natural excitability of his nature would assert itself.

"If you are so severe," said one of the two pretty women he addressed, and who was his hostess, "we won't any of us act, and then where will you be?"

"Freed from a dilemma. If none of you acted, the thing would have to be thrown up. You would really oblige me by carrying out that threat."

"As we don't wish to oblige you," she retorted, laughing, "we won't carry it out, though I am afraid after so much unusual excitement on your part you will be too exhausted to act yourself. It was so unnecessary too, as we have found a substitute for Lady Flora. Miss Manners will take the part."

"Miss Manners?" he said, inquiringly.

"Yes. Now don't pretend you don't know who I mean. You took her in to dinner last night."

"Oh! That girl. My dear Mrs. Burnes, she is so ugly and so stupid! And though it is a small part, that any fool could take, still it does require a certain amount of intelligence."

"As you hardly uttered a word to her the while," began the other lady, but broke off abruptly: for on the utterance of his paradoxical statement the young man turned round to find the object of it close behind him; so close that it was impossible to hope she had not heard every word.

Arthur Hamilton was not given to embarrassment, but at this moment he was absolutely speechless. Miss Manners was not handsome, perhaps, but her dignified self-possession under these trying circumstances proved her to be a woman of character, if not of brilliant intellect, and a slight flush on her sallow face showed that her self-possession was not the result of stolid stupidity. With scarcely a pause she took up the thread of the conversation.

"Lady Flora seems certain that she will not be able to act to-night.

It appears that there is no one available to fill her place but me. I never have acted, but I fancy in so small a part I can scarcely do much harm. I suppose it is not very difficult?" she added, appealing to Arthur, with a quiet unconcern, in which it would have needed a very keen observer to have detected the malice. And Arthur was, as he afterwards said, too "completely staggered" to detect anything. "Oh no, it's not very difficult," he stammered, and muttering something about the last touches to the stage, he escaped.

"Poor Mr. Hamilton! this sudden caprice on the part of Lady Flora is rather hard on him as stage manager," said Miss Manners, as he left the room.

"Yes," returned Mrs. Burnes, vaguely; "but we must leave you in peace to learn your part. We have a final rehearsal after luncheon." And she and Mrs. Finsbury departed, hardly less glad than Arthur to make their escape.

Gertrude Manners stood for a moment, with a half bitter, half disdainful smile on her face, but something like tears in her eyes. Then she walked to the fire-place and took a deliberate survey of her features in the glass over the chimney-piece. She was not handsome, but a close observer would hardly have sat beside her all through a long dinner, and decided that she was ugly. Her large hazel eyes were variable in their shades as the sea under an April sky, her whole face was expressive and mobile; moreover, her figure was tall and graceful. Nevertheless, she did not appear conscious of these advantages; for, after a moment of keen scrutiny, she sighed and said, half aloud, as she turned away, "Well, I am plain, but—" she glanced at the play-book in her hand, and a bright, confident smile broke over her face—"we shall see."

At three o'clock the Corps Dramatique assembled on the stage. It consisted of the hostess, Mrs. Burnes, a clever, piquante little woman, Mrs. Finsbury, one of the beauties of the day, Gertrude Manners, Arthur, who played the hero, besides being stage manager and general director, Mr. Finsbury, and two somewhat vapid young men, whose ideas of acting were of the most misty kind, but who took any amount of snubbing and tutoring with perfect good temper. Gertrude's part was that of heroine, in so far as that she was the hero's lady love; but she had little to do, beyond standing about, perhaps the most difficult thing of all to do gracefully, and to make a few tender speeches to Arthur, which she did in much the same tone as a child learning to read. Arthur's artistic soul was too much for him, and forgetting all awkward circumstances, he exclaimed, "This will never do, Miss Manners. Can't you be more empressée, more tender, as if you worshipped the very ground I tread on?" and, looking into her face to give emphasis to his words, he found it lit up with suppressed laughter.

"I am afraid I am not a good enough actress for that," she replied quietly.

At half-past eight the drawing-room was filled to overflowing. The curtain had risen, and the play proceeded most satisfactorily.

Arthur quite justified the eulogiums that were indiscriminately heaped upon him. Mr. Finsbury, as the heavy swell, was painstaking and accurate, if a little heavier than was absolutely necessary. The vapid young men, one as the villain, the other as supplementary hero, acquitted themselves creditably enough. The hostess kept the audience genuinely amused by her clever impersonation of a scheming widow, while Mrs. Finsbury made so fair a picture in her every attitude, that her lack of histrionic power was readily forgiven by the spectators.

And Gertrude? Gertrude, carefully got up by good-natured Mrs. Finsbury, really did, with the aid of darkened eye-lashes, rouge, powder, and becomingly-arranged hair, look almost pretty. She had little to say, but was on the stage a good deal; and here her natural self-possession stood her in good stead: she was perfectly at her ease. But beyond this, she contrived to throw into every word and gesture the expression of her deep interest in the hero. She followed the dialogue, her face betraying every emotion that it called up. In a word, she not only made something, but a good deal out of her part; made herself one of the objects of interest in the piece; and once, in uttering the conventional protestations of undying affection to her lover, she clasped her hands on his arm, looking into his face with a passionate fervour of which she was herself unconscious, her eyes glowing, her lips quivering, her face and voice expressing such an intensity of devotion, that Arthur was startled into forgetting his answer.

It was over. Dancing was the next event on the programme, and people danced and talked it over in the complimentary style usual on such occasions. "How good Mr. Hamilton was." "How lovely Mrs. Finsbury looked." "How cleverly Mrs. Burnes acted." But one and all were honestly enthusiastic over Gertrude. "She is a born actress." "She was wonderful." "It was so clever of her to make so much of that small part." And to each and all Gertrude returned the same quiet smile of thanks. Arthur received his laurels with less than his usual easy self-complacency. He was distrait and even irritable. He was the only person in the house who did not congratulate Gertrude on her success. He never went near her. At the end of the evening, however, when nearly everyone not of the house party was gone, and two more dances must close the entertainment, he found himself close to Gertrude. He glanced at her, and, with a hesitation that those who knew him best would have supposed him incapable of, asked her to dance. All her rouge and eye-black washed off, she was once more to most people a sallow, uninteresting girl. But he could not forget those deep, earnest eyes, the intense fervour of her voice, the passionate emo-

tion expressed in her gesture. Even now, looking at her face, he said to himself that her eyes were beautiful. If she loved would they so deepen, and her tones take that thrilling tenderness? He roused himself from these speculations, which he reflected were foolish, to listen to her words, which were commonplace enough, and uttered in tones not the least thrilling or tender, though they were clear and soft, as he might have discovered the night before at dinner, if he had chosen to notice it. He remarked it now, however, and connected them indissolubly with the passion they were capable of expressing.

"Do you know you are a born actress," he said, when at last they arrived at the inevitable subject of the theatricals.

She smiled, not without a suspicion of triumph in her eyes.

"I don't know that exactly, but I have always felt sure I could act."

"Then how is it that you have never tried before?"

"I suppose it never occurred to anyone to suppose me capable of acting."

"The people you have lived with must have been fools."

She looked at him and laughed, after which his share in the conversation was confined to monosyllables.

And yet she bore him no malice. Through the days that followed she accepted his attentions with perfect ease and composure, was always agreeable and amiable, and never seemed the least aware that any notice from the fastidious and much-admired Arthur Hamilton was a great honour. No deeper intention on his part ever occurred to her.

The party had broken up. There was no one left but Arthur, Gertrude and her father. Arthur entering the drawing-room about five o'clock found Gertrude there alone, kneeling on the hearthrug reading by the fire, for the daylight had failed and the lamps had not yet been brought. The flickering flames threw a rosy glow on her face, and lent an unwonted lustre to her hair; her attitude was graceful; altogether she made a pretty picture. To his eyes so pretty a one that he paused to look at her with so much earnestness, that he was quite startled when, becoming conscious, she looked up and spoke. He was at once seized with the sense of discomfiture that always assailed him in her presence, and which was the more uncomfortable from being a sensation to which he was quite unaccustomed.

She, on the contrary, was perfectly cool, and not the least aware that he was not.

"How dreary it always is," she remarked, "to be the last remnant of a large party."

"Yes," he said absently; then added hesitatingly: "You are not going to-morrow, are you? I heard Mrs. Burnes ask your father to stay."

"She did ask us, but we cannot manage it. We are positively going to-morrow."

"You are—I—I wonder if I shall ever see you again."

"I don't know," she said indifferently. "The world is very small. It is curious how one does knock up against people."

"One does—Yes—Certainly—Miss Manners, in case I never should see you again, will you overlook the shortness of our acquaintance and let me tell you something."

"Certainly," she said, with a slight accent of surprise.

"I—I don't know whether I ought to allude to it, but I must begin by doing so. I know you must have heard something I said of you, something utterly idiotic and senseless, like the fool I was, but ——"

"Yes," she interrupted, quietly; "we need not go back to that now."

"If you knew," he went on unheeding, "how bitterly I have regretted that foolish speech, how utterly I retract it, how, however I might, in my ignorant presumption, have chosen to regard you then, you are to me now the one woman in the world, your face the most beautiful, your every attribute the most perfect. It is now the most earnest hope I ever entertained, that you will some day be my wife—but—I love you!"

A sudden flame leaping up revealed Gertrude's face, on which neither confusion, agitation, pleasure, nor displeasure was depicted; nothing but the most intense and genuine astonishment. The flame dropped again; the room was nearly dark, and in the darkness the answer sounded clear and composed.

"I am grateful to you, Mr. Hamilton, for the compliment you pay me, and am sorry to pain you, but it cannot be."

She rose as she spoke as if to leave the room, but he detained her by an imploring gesture.

"One moment, Miss Manners. Is there no hope for me—have I offended you irrecoverably by my conceited folly?"

There was some amusement perceptible in the soft, distinct tones which answered:

"That has nothing to do with it. My vanity was hurt for a moment perhaps, but less hurt than if I had heard such a speech from a person whose opinion I valued."

There was a pause after this, and then he said meekly:

"At any rate you forgive me?"

"Quite," she answered, impatiently. "I am not a child, or a fool to bear malice for foolish words that were never intended to reach my ears." Then she added gently: "You have atoned for them sufficiently to satisfy the most unreasonable of women."

"But you have too poor an opinion of me ever to care for me?"

"No, I never said that," she answered, kindly. "I like you—I do, indeed—as an acquaintance; but ——"

The footman's entrance at this moment with the lamp put a summary stop to the interview, and Gertrude prudently avoided any possibility of its recurrence by walking out of the room.

One hot day in July, about six months later, three people were riding slowly up Hay Hill. Of these, one was Arthur Hamilton, the other two, Mr. and Mrs. Finsbury. The lady was as pretty and charming as ever, her husband stolid and somewhat bored, while Arthur wore his most listless London air, spoke in the most languid of tones, and appeared wholly unimpressed by his companion's smiles.

"Do you know who that is?" she said, as she bowed to a tall figure in black, who was coming down the hill.

"No," he answered, "I did not look at her."

"Do you remember Miss Manners, that plain girl who acted at Friar's Park, that you got into such a scrape with, and devoted yourself to afterwards by way of making up for it? It was wrong of you, for she might have taken your attentions for meaning more than they did: I don't suppose she is much accustomed to attention."

"Miss Manners! Yes, I remember her," he said; and something in his tone struck Mrs. Finsbury for the moment. She gave him a curious glance, but, reading nothing in his face, forgot it, and went on.

"She has just lost her father, poor girl. He was the only relation she had in the world, and he has left her penniless. She has some wild idea of going on the stage, which is foolish, as it does not follow that because a girl can act well in drawing-room theatricals she will ever make anything by it as a profession. However ——"

"I think I'll go and speak to her," Arthur broke in, with the sudden impetuosity which always contrasted so oddly with his assumed indifference to everything; and before Mrs. Finsbury and her husband could speak he had turned his horse and galloped down the hill. He caught Miss Manners up in Berkeley Square, had dismounted, and was at her side before she was aware of his vicinity. A faint tinge of colour rose to her cheeks as he spoke to her.

"I am so grieved to hear of your troubles," he began hurriedly, but with such genuine sympathy in his tones that the girl turned away her head to recover composure before answering him. Arthur had probably had no distinct idea in hurrying after her, except the pleasure of seeing her for a moment; but the sight of her emotion put to flight any remnants of sense or self-control that were left him. Without considering for a moment time, place, or circumstances, walking beside her with his bridle over his arm, he began ruthlessly:

"Miss Manners, it is eight months since I last saw you, and in all that time I have never ceased to think of you. I love you as much as ever: more than ever. Don't refuse to listen to me now. I cannot bear to think of your battling with the world alone. Gertrude, won't you give me the right to shield you from all future cares?"

Two pretty girls riding home to luncheon with their father, bowed graciously to Arthur at this moment, wondering at the vacant stare with which he received their salutations. They would have wondered

more could they have heard his conversation with "that plain girl in black."

For a moment Gertrude was silent, struggling with contending emotions. A sense of the absurdity of the thing, and a sense of pain together disposing her to be hysterical. She conquered it, though her eyes were filled with tears as she replied: "No, Mr. Hamilton; it cannot be. I do not love you."

"But you would learn to love me," he urged.

She shook her head. "It would be wrong. It is a temptation, for I am very lonely, but ——"

"Then marry me," he broke in eagerly. "I only ask for the right to devote myself to you. You would learn to love me. I will take the risk."

If only the fine ladies who ran after this fastidious young man and took such infinite pains to secure his favour could have heard him!

"No," said Gertrude. "It is not for these motives one should marry." Then she added, kindly: "You are worthy of a better fate than to be married for the sake of your money. I hope you will find it some day."

He looked for a moment into her face, and knew it was hopeless.

"Forgive me for having troubled you," he said. "Only if ever you need a friend, think of me. I shall always deem it a privilege to serve you, no matter in how small a way. Will you remember this?"

"I will remember," she answered softly. "Now, Good-bye."

"Will you come to the theatre to-night, Hamilton, and see this new star they are making such a fuss about?"

And Arthur, who was staying for a day or two with a friend in New York, expressed his willingness to go anywhere his host wished to take him. As they were leaving the house, one of the children came flying down the stairs.

"Mr. Hamilton, I have made you a buttonhole, please take it."

Arthur turned with a smile to the little maiden as she continued: "I have tied it up with blue ribbon, my doll's best hair-ribbon." Whereupon she produced an exquisite white rosebud and bit of fern, tied with a narrow piece of common ribbon. It was not an improvement to the bouquet, and had decidedly an odd appearance in Arthur's coat. But Arthur was no longer the languid dandy he had once been. Handsome as ever, and considerably improved by the sensible, manly manner that had taken the place of his former affectation of perpetual boredom, he was a greater favourite than ever with the fair sex, but they received little encouragement to pet him now. To children he was always kind, and never for a moment dreamt of hurting this child's feelings by rejecting the ribbon. He kissed the donor, and assured her he felt much flattered.

The theatre was hot and crowded. Arthur was tired from travelling

and sight-seeing. He went to sleep directly he was in his seat, and was only aroused by the vociferous applause that greeted the star. He woke himself up to look at her, and at the first glance his heart stood still. She began to speak. There was no mistaking those clear, sweet tones, even under the trained stage intonation. It was indeed Gertrude, whom he had neither seen nor heard of since he had parted from her in Berkeley Square. Breathlessly he watched her every movement and listened to every word. She was a great actress, undoubtedly; she carried her audience with her in every emotion she pourtrayed. Her passion and fervour reduced them to tears one moment, at another her rippling laughter gladdened their hearts. Only Arthur neither laughed nor cried. To him she was not the heroine of the piece, whose vicissitudes of fortune he followed with eager interest. She was herself, the woman he loved; he did not know whether she were acting ill or well, hardly what words she was uttering. He only knew he was once more looking on the face, and listening to the voice that for five years had so persistently haunted his memory.

It was over. He could not tell whether she had seen him; indeed, till this moment, it had not occurred to him to wonder. Now, however, as in answer to repeated calls, she came before the curtain, he was seized with a wild desire to attract her attention. He took the little white rosebud out of his button-hole, and threw it to her. In vain. A bouquet fell at the same moment, and his poor little flower lay unobserved near the footlights.

"Well, my good friend, do you mean to come away to-night?" asked his companion. Arthur started, then, collecting himself, explained that the actress was a former acquaintance of his, and suggested going round to the stage-door to see her. "You would not be admitted; she is never to be found behind the scenes."

So Arthur was compelled to wait till the next day, when, procuring her address, he started off to see her. She was at home, and met him with a vivid blush and a nervous flutter that was most unusual to her. Their greeting was commonplace enough, and when her colour had faded, Arthur was not distracted by the exciting nature of the conversation, from observing how time had dealt with her. There were silver lines in her hair that had surely no business to be there, and lines on her face that told of weary struggles. But the green hazel eyes were soft and expressive as ever, and the play of countenance even more varied. But she had lost her cool self-possession, a circumstance he remarked, and attributed to the same wear and tear that had lined her face and touched her hair with grey.

"May I congratulate you," he said, presently, "on the success you have achieved?"

She smiled a little sadly. "Yes, I suppose I have succeeded; but ——"

"But what?"

"But nothing. I was going to moralise on the emptiness of fame, only I thought better of it."

"Does it not satisfy you?" he said.

"Does anything in life ever quite satisfy?" she returned, smiling.

"But—but—am I impertinent to ask?—Are you happy?" She crimsoned, and he hastily added: "I mean—perhaps—you want—I mean ——" and he floundered hopelessly.

"I don't want anything," she replied, quietly. "I never have wanted anything. Whenever I have been in trouble I have found kind friends."

"And I cannot help you in any way? Ah, no: if you found friends when you were in trouble, you will not want for them now you have attained fame. But if you ever should —— Do you remember what I said to you once?"

"I remember," she returned, in a low voice.

"I am not going to torment you by repeating all that again, but ——" A sudden gesture on her part here passed unnoticed, for his eyes were fixed on the carpet. "Only if you ever want a friend, I am ready now as I was then. Good-bye, Miss Manners."

"Good-bye," she replied, very quietly, too much accustomed, perhaps, to his sudden impulses to wonder at this abrupt departure.

But, as he turned away, not looking where he was going, he knocked over a small table that stood near; and all the small nick-nacks upon it went rolling in different directions.

"I am so sorry," he said, as he stooped to pick them up. A little sandelwood carved box lay at his feet, and, in taking it up, he touched the spring. It flew open. Inside it lay a faded white rose-bud, tied with a bit of blue ribbon. For a moment he stood bewildered. Then a great joy came over his face. He looked at her. With downcast eyes and crimson cheeks she stood silent and trembling. Down fell box and rosebud to the floor again.

"Gertrude! my Gertrude, at last!"

"Yes, I love you now," she confessed, a little time after. "I think I began to love you the moment you left my side that day in Berkeley Square, when I began to realise what I had lost. And, oh, Arthur! I am so tired of fame, and of rehearsing and acting, applause and bouquets, and all the excitement and weariness of it. Take me away from it all, Arthur."

Which he was quite ready to do at the earliest opportunity.

GEORGE CONSIDINE.

By the Author of "The Ghost of Aldrum Hall."

"BY the way, Jack, you have never told me how it was that George Considine left the army. Hadn't he a disappointment, or something of that sort?"

We were sitting together, my brother and I, in the old-fashioned oak-panelled coffee-room of the Hook and Hatchet, at Remhurst, our hunting quarters in the year of grace, '73, enjoying the pleasant warmth of a genuine wood fire, and a bottle of our landlord's '47—very good it was, too—after a long, hard day with the West Dartshire hounds.

"Ah, that is rather a long story and a sad one," answered Jack gravely, refilling my glass and his own, whilst I composed myself to listen to the following narrative:—

"He was a great chum of mine," began Jack, "when we were at Sandhurst together. I met him first at Raeford, that summer you went abroad with my father. He and I, poor Wentworth, and two or three other lads were staying down in the holidays. He first met Mary Laborde there. She, too, was staying at Raeford. Lady Lanchester was her aunt, or cousin, I forget which, and Considine fell desperately in love with her after a boyish fashion: he was about fourteen, I suppose, at the time.

"After that visit I don't think Considine saw much of his lady love until he came of age. He asked me to the ball they gave there, and had no eyes for anyone but Miss Laborde, so I was not surprised when he told me, a month later, that they were engaged. Beautiful? Ay, she was, and she made many an honest heart ache, too.

"Well, Considine and I went out to India soon after, as you know. Of course his people would not hear of his taking a wife with him; in fact, I believe they did not altogether like the engagement. I lost sight of him for two or three years; he was a shockingly bad correspondent, and the only letter I ever had from him, about six months after our arrival out there, contained nothing in the world but a description of a pony he and another fellow had bought, and some rather strong language relative to mosquitos. I answered the interesting despatch, and then the correspondence dropped.

"About three years after, you know I was ordered home invalided, and the first person I met on board the *City of Edinburgh* was Considine, looking as if I had parted with him but the day before. He nursed me during that voyage as you would have done, Charlie, and when I got a little better, and condescended to take some interest in my fellow-creatures, he told me how it was we chanced to meet again on our homeward way.

"He was still engaged, and had kept up a regular correspondence with Miss Laborde during those three years. Her last letter had brought him news of her mother's death. 'So I'm going home to be married, old fellow. She is left without a penny in the world,' he said to me. 'How on earth Mrs. Laborde contrived to live in the style she did, goodness only knows. But I have enough with Marston, and she shall never know what poverty is in the future, if I can help it.'

"He asked me to be his best man at the wedding, and his last words, as we parted at Paddington—he was going straight down to Raeford—were, 'I'll write and let you know all about it, Jack. Keep yourself in readiness to come and do your duty by me; you mustn't fail me, you know.' I answered him jokingly, and he ran off to his train. I went down to Paddington next morning to meet a servant—a lad they were sending up to me from Aldrum; and standing on the platform watching the Birmingham train draw up and empty itself, I caught sight of the back of a slight, familiar figure in a grey suit, getting out of a smoking carriage, and I ran up and laid my hand on Considine's shoulder. 'Didn't expect to see you back so soon, old fellow. Nothing wrong, I hope. Where are you going?' 'To the devil, I think,' he said, under his breath, and trying to shake my hand off. I just glanced at him, and knew what was the matter. He had his portmanteau in his hand, and was striding off towards the cab-stand as he spoke. I followed him, and put my arm through his. ''Pon my word, Considine, I'm awfully sorry. Come home with me, will you? It will be better than going to the club; my rooms are quiet.' 'No,' he answered, savagely, 'hanged if I do!' but he jumped into a cab, giving the fellow no answer when he asked where to drive; so I gave him my address, and Considine muttered a 'Thanks, Kenyon,' as I sat down beside him. He looked wretchedly ill and exhausted, and suspecting that he had not breakfasted, I made him have something when we reached home. Afterwards he said he was going down to his place at Marston, if I would go with him; they could easily get a couple of beds ready for us, and he thought there was some shooting.

"I had nothing particular to keep me in town just then. I saw Considine really desired my company, so I consented to go with him. His father had been dead some eighteen months, and his mother was abroad at some German baths for her health; the house at Marston was shut up and left in the charge of the housekeeper and a couple of maidservants. We telegraphed, giving them about an hour's notice, and then collected our traps and ran down by the four express.

"Marston Magna is a small out-of-the-world village, hidden down among the miry lanes and deep clayey hollows of South Meadshire, and the Grange, Considine's place, is little more than a shooting-box; a quaint, many-gabled, grey stone house, standing on a little platform of green turf, and surrounded on three sides by a belt of Scotch firs,

and a wide moat. Set in a dark background of trees, the place has a damp and somewhat dreary look. Passing through the line of white mist that rose on either hand from the weedy, stagnant water that autumn evening, gave one a curiously uncomfortable sensation, as of stepping into some undiscovered region of gloom.

"At night, after we had dined together, and were smoking in sober silence by the fire, I looked up suddenly and saw the keen, quiet eyes fixed on me. Considine put down his cigar, and spoke. 'I should like to tell you all about it, Jack,' he said, in his usual tone. 'I'm afraid I made rather a fool of myself this morning and was rude to you.'—I interrupted him with a gesture of dissent.—'I beg your pardon, if I were so,' he went on. 'But I was in a cursed temper: it's all over now; I only feel like a fellow awakened out of a pleasant dream a little too roughly.'

"He paused a moment or two; I thought I ought to speak, but I didn't in the least know what to say. So I held my tongue, and Considine began his story quietly, with his usual dry and composed manner.

"'I had no misgivings whatever when I started on my journey to Raeford last evening, though I had neither written nor telegraphed to—to—them to expect me; meaning, you know, to take them by surprise. I did not reach Raeford until rather late—it was getting dusk, in fact: you know the arrangement on that South East line—if you are in a hurry you had better get out and walk. The Hall is only half a mile from the station, and I left my portmanteau in the cloak-room and walked up. Of course no one at the house knew me, and I would not send in my name. I asked for Miss Laborde, and the fellow showed me into the library—I don't think he knew who was there. There were two solitary candles burning on the table, and looking dim and yellow in the ruddy glow of the fire that went blazing up the wide chimney. I went towards it, not seeing that there was anyone in the room. She stood in that little west window, Jack, half hidden by the crimson curtain, and with her back to me; but there was the sleeve of a brown shooting coat round her waist, and both her white hands rested on his shoulders. I saw at a glance who it was—Tom Thornhill, the richest and most finished fool in all Blankshire. I suppose I must have made some exclamation, for they both turned round with a start—they had not heard me enter or cross the room. She, Mary, knew me, and gave a little, half-inaudible cry, covering her face with both hands. I believe she must have thought she saw my ghost for a moment; Thornhill stared stupidly, twisting the end of his moustache. "I am sorry to have intruded upon you, Miss Laborde; I see I was presuming too far on my welcome. I should have asked permission to come," I said; rather brutally, I'm afraid. She raised her head. "You have not had my letter, George! oh, forgive me! but how could I know you had not had it?"—"I received no letter since that one you wrote in June,"

I interrupted. "I wrote to you to—explain; I wrote last—oh, long ago," she cried out. Jack, I knew it was a lie, but how could I say so? I bowed, and said I was sorry not to have had the letter; it would have prevented this contretemps; but I needed no further explanation, and I wished—she broke in haughtily: "It is not my fault, Captain Considine, that you did not receive my letter. I, too, am sorry; most grieved; but I did what I thought right in writing to ask you to release me from my engagement: it is a mistake, better for both our sakes, forgotten." I believe I said something I ought not to have done about a woman's faith; she drew back, flushing angrily. "I have been very wrong, I know," she said, "but I could not help it; I could not help it; I have been forced to do things against my better judgment: you must forgive me, George." She looked so beautiful, Kenyon, as she stood there by his side, her eyes brimming over with tears, her face a little flushed, and her white hand held out to me! I did forgive her, I think; but I couldn't take that hand: it was mine no longer, though God knows I could have died to call it mine one moment, even then.'

"Considine paused a second or two, turning his head away from the light.

"'She vowed she loved me—vowed to be true to me till death,' he went on, at last. 'But perhaps it's not in the nature of woman to be true to a man with only fifteen hundred acres and half pay, when an estate of three thousand and a title are laid at their feet. What more was there to say or do? I came away, leaving them together, my lost love and that—fellow. I have seen her face for the last time, Jack—don't interrupt me. The seven train had been gone half an hour when I got back to the station, and I had to stay at the Railway Inn all night and come up to town this morning. I would sooner have met you, old fellow, than anyone, just then. You know all there is to tell now. It is like you to have listened so patiently.'

"I held out my hand. Considine wrung it heartily, and then turned to light a cigar, and sat silent for the rest of the evening.

"Perhaps no one less intimately acquainted with him than I was would have guessed how crushing the blow had been. His very determination to tell me the story; a story which, by the way, most men would have shrunk from laying before a friend; and his quiet and composed manner of telling it, only gave me a deeper insight into the strength of the love and faith that had been so cruelly betrayed. Somehow I felt that, with fortune good or bad, George Considine would never be the same man again.

"The next few days dragged out a slow length in long stretches of dismal fog, or still more dismal small rain. But in spite of the weather Considine and I plodded silently over acres and acres of stubble every morning for hours, and with little regard for future seasons, killing anything up shamelessly. But the long days in the open air and the simple living did me a world of good, together with the nursing

and petting Considine's old housekeeper lavished upon me. She ordered us both about as if we had been lads of twelve or fourteen, and used to appear at all hours of the day and night that we spent indoors, with dry socks, comforters, strengthening jelly, or some concoction of the kind.

"With renewed health and plenty of good sport the days were still long and dull, and I should not have been sorry to get back to town at the end of a week, but for Considine. He was terribly down at times, and I had determined to stand by him as long as he wanted me. It was worst in the evening when, after dinner, we had drawn our chairs to the fire over wine and walnuts, he would not talk or smoke or play écarté.

"The Grange was fully half a mile from the village, and the clergyman, an old bachelor with a gouty foot, the only inhabitant with whom Considine was on visiting terms. More than one evening at that time, he sat until he had emptied the decanter and—but you will understand; I need only touch upon the subject. I said nothing at first, but the third time it happened I thought I ought to interfere, and I got up and put the wine away. He half rose, with an angry word. I went round to him and laid my hand on his shoulder. 'Excuse me, old fellow, but I can't see you do that. It won't help you, you know. The man who thinks to drown trouble so, is ——'

"'A fool—you're right about that, Jack,' he put in. 'Thank you, for reminding me; but the temptation's strong, when there's nothing left worth living for, to make as short work of it as possible.'

"I believe I lectured him about duty and so forth, and he took it all in good part: spite of his faults, he was a good-hearted fellow was Considine, and he never transgressed again while we were alone. For the rest, the sin, I am persuaded, will not be at his door. Of course it was a great mistake, his leaving the army, and I told him so, over and over again. It was no use; he sent in his papers and the thing was done.

"One day we were tramping homewards from an out-lying farm, after a hard morning's work and not much sport, the birds were getting wild—when a rattle of wheels and a sudden shout warned us to step out of the way. I turned round to see a well-appointed tandem driven by a tall fellow in a mackintosh, and before I had time to wonder what brought him there he had pulled up, and his groom was at the leader's head.

"'Hallo, Considine,' he called out, 'I was just coming to call upon you. Heard yesterday you were down here. How do?'

"'St. Just, by Jove!'

"It struck me that Considine's exclamation betrayed more surprise than pleasure. However, he returned the greeting cordially enough, and introduced me. I had heard of this Colonel St. Just before, and knew a little about him: enough, in fact, to make me rather curious to see him. Yes, one of the St. Justs of La Fontaine; he was a younger son, but very well off. He was in the Crimea, and wounded

at Sebastopol. A man about middle age, I should say, tall and very slight, with a delicate, high-bred face, fair and smooth as a woman's, and with a woman's sweetness of expression. The smile with which he raised his hat to me was, I think, the most winning I ever saw. I made these observations while Considine was talking to him, or, more correctly, answering questions. An invitation to dinner was given then. 'Come to-morrow at seven. We dine early. I have several young fellows staying with me, and I have to be careful of their morals, you know; and bring your friend—I beg your pardon, Captain Kenyon, did you say? I hope you will give me the pleasure of your company, Captain Kenyon, though I am afraid you will find it rather slow after Indian gaieties.'

"I accepted. With a good deal of shouting at the horses, and 'Good nights' exchanged, they dashed off into the gathering mist.

"'I didn't know St. Just was a friend of yours, George,' I said, as we shouldered our guns and plodded on again.

"'Oh, I have met him two or three times; I don't know him very well,' he answered, with some reserve, remarking presently that he wished he had not accepted the invitation; he supposed all the other fellows knew about it.

"'Dare say they do; but you must face that.'

"'Suppose so, unless I break my neck first,' he answered, with a bitter laugh.

"Walford, St. Just's place, was some three miles from Marston; a comparatively new house, and furnished in that high-art style which was just beginning to come into fashion among a few enthusiasts in the æsthetic world. The dinner and wines were superb, and the other guests pleasant and gentlemanly enough: a few young officers —not one of whom, however, Considine or I knew; one or two Oxford men, Colonel Dixon of the 61st, a barrister, and old Squire Harwood, of Wixhope.

"The conversation savoured rather of the stable at first, but there was not much harm in it. It was St. Just himself who gave to it a tone I did not altogether like—a covert sneer now and then at things no gentleman should sneer at—an imputation of wrong motive where none should have been imputed—a joke which a man would hardly have cared to repeat to his sister. More than once, I must confess, I felt a little annoyed; still, I could not help watching my host with more interest and admiration than is usually excited by a total stranger on the mind of a man with an amazingly good opinion of himself. The fair, handsome face, with its winning smile; the rich, deep voice, never raised above a certain pitch—he set the whole table in a roar and turned to swear at the servants in precisely the same low, grave tones—yet so clear that no word could escape you; and the graceful, polished manner, fascinated me in spite of myself. I couldn't keep my eyes off him, and yet I was glad when dinner was over, and we went to the billiard and smoking rooms.

"After a good deal of persuasion, Considine sat down at the card-table with Colonel Dixon. I did not care to play, and, pleading a slight headache as an excuse, took my cigar to a window-seat, with a view of making further observations. St. Just himself would not play, but walked about from one room to another, marking for billiards or looking over the hands of the half-dozen who were at cards. He seemed to me to exercise the same singular fascination over all his guests, the young fellows especially. More than one lad I saw colour and start like a girl when the white hand rested on his shoulder, and the handsome head bent down over him.

"I got Considine away tolerably early, but not before he had pledged himself to dine there the following night; and hearing this, I, too, accepted the invitation, which of course was extended to me.

"The evening passed off in much the same way as the previous one had done, but that there was some high play. More than enough wine had been drunk before we left, and—well, I had to drive Considine home. I was more grieved and annoyed about it than I can tell you, and none the less so that I knew whose doing it was. St. Just played his part of tempter carefully and with infinite tact; but it was he, I knew, who had filled Considine's glass again and again, and proposed the higher stakes; and when George grew excited and angry through the quiet rebuke his host gave him, I had seen a gleam of something like satisfaction—a look in the grey eyes that startled me for a moment, and the recollection of which cost my friend a lecture next morning. He listened in moody silence to what I had to say until I concluded.

"'If you are wise, old fellow, you will break with St. Just and his set. You know as well as I do that they are no good. We saw enough last night to give us a fair idea of what goes on there. Why not go abroad and stay with your mother a few weeks? I believe it would do you good.'

"He faced round on me at that.

"'Thanks, Jack; but I believe I am old enough to choose my own friends and place of residence. I'm sorry if they don't suit you; but the remedy lies in your own hands.'

"I would not have borne the insult from any other man, Charlie; but I could not quarrel with Considine. I looked at him steadily for a moment, waiting for an apology; and when his eyes met mine, he came to me, holding out his hand.

"'I beg pardon, Jack. I didn't mean that; but you must let me go to the deuce my own way.'

"'There is no necessity for your going there at all, that I know of,' I answered, laughing. 'And you will send an excuse instead of going over to Walford to-day, eh?'

"'Hang it, a fellow must have something to do, and there is capital cover-shooting in the park,' he said shortly, and with a slight frown.

"'Never mind the shooting, old fellow; do what you know to be right.'

"'I don't know it to be right; and, 'pon my word, I will not be preached at, Jack. If you don't care to go, I'll take your excuses.'

"He rang the bell, and ordered the dog-cart; and seeing that he was bent on having his own way, I said no more, and I went with him too, after a tough battle with my confounded pride. Leave him to himself just then I could not, and call myself his friend.

"I have since understood better the object St. Just had in view in asking us to Walford. It was said, on very good authority, I believe, that more than one large estate in the county belonged to him, and had he chosen to lay claim to them the nominal owners would have inevitably come to grief. Scarcely one of his friends was not over head and ears in debt to him, and Considine's little place of fifteen hundred acres at Marston was perhaps more of a Naboth's vineyard to his neighbour than he was at all aware of. Moreover, the fellow had such an extraordinary love of and desire for power that he would spare no thought or trouble to bring a young man under his influence whether he had money or not. And not alone those of his own station. This extreme courtesy of manner, and this pleasant word and smile, that achieved to some extent his end with his inferiors, he never seemed to forget; and, though hard and stern in his dealings with his tenants, no man was more popular among the village people. His very grooms and stablemen watched for a look from him, and worshipped, if they feared him.

"I was not altogether pleased to find, when he came in to dinner that night, that St. Just had sent for our things, and we were booked to spend a week there. He came up to me in the gun-room with a courteous word or two. 'He had induced Considine to spend a few days with him, just for the pheasant shooting—would I give him the pleasure of my company? Considine's friends were his—I must stay,' and so forth.

"I should like to have knocked him down, Charlie; but all I could do was to accept the invitation rather awkwardly, and resolve to get George away as soon as possible. He was standing by the window, and I went up to him.

"'You are going to stay, of course,' he said to me, rather shortly.

"I answered him with a touch of coolness, and, seeing he was in no mood to be reasoned with, left him alone. I wish now I had not done so. There were some wild things said and done that night, and I know Considine lost a lot of money—more than he could afford to do, by a long shot. I had to look on, fret and fume inwardly, and curse the winning smile and voice that were luring him on to destruction.

"My dear fellow, I tell you until you experienced it you could not understand how strong a fascination there was in St. Just's manner

to a man younger than himself, and to whom his notice was—well, a little flattering. He came up to me in the course of the evening, confound him, and complimented me on my long distances and one or two lucky double shots; and, spite of my indignation and disgust at the part he was playing, I couldn't help feeling his half-dozen well-bred, polished sentences were worth a whole chapter of praise from any other man. Well, he was a brave soldier, and served his country nobly. God forgive him the ill he wrought to my friend.

"'Considine seems to be playing rather recklessly to-night; perhaps it might be as well to give him a hint to-morrow,' he said to me, glancing over his shoulder at George's flushed face. My blood was up, and I answered him hotly.

"'I should think the hint would come best from yourself, sir.'

"He turned away with a courteous 'Perhaps so,' that was in itself the most cutting rebuke I ever had; but, assuming that I was right, he took very good care that I should have no opportunity of giving the hint next day, and I made one for myself by following George to his room, when he went to dress for dinner. I was admitted, not with very good grace, however, and I plunged into the subject straight away.

"'Look here, old fellow, if you mean to stay here, I don't.'

"He sat down on the bed and stared at me.

"'Very well. Sorry this place doesn't suit you. Shall you go up to town?'

"'No; I don't mean that, George. You know what I want to say. Let us cut the concern; we have neither of us any business here.'

"'I don't know what right you have to dictate to me in the matter, Kenyon.' He spoke haughtily, and I answered him in the same tone.

"'I have a right; you are my friend. I have never proved myself otherwise, have I?'

"'No.'

"'You must know how disagreeable it is to me to have to speak on this subject; but 'pon my honour, Considine, I can't help it. I can't see you go to the deuce without——'

"He interrupted me with a sneer. 'I am much obliged; I didn't know I was so far on the road to destruction that my friends could tell me to my face that I was going to the deuce.'

"I saw the mistake I had made, and did what I could to repair it. 'I beg your pardon, George. I shouldn't have said that, but what is the use mincing the matter? You know this is not a good house for a young fellow to be in. I know no reason why you and I should stay.'

"'I have remarked before, I believe, Kenyon, that there is no reason why you should not go if you don't like it. I suppose I can take care of myself under any circumstances, and I mean to avail myself of St. Just's invitation.'

"He got up and rang for hot water. I knew, blundering fool that I was, that I had overshot my mark. One more effort I made.

"'I think you owe me an apology for that speech, Considine; but I don't want to quarrel. I have only spoken because we are friends, and I'm sorry you can't take my warning as I meant it.'

"'Don't say any more: we shall understand each other better in future, I hope.'

"'I hope so,' I said, and took my departure. "My wounded feelings would have induced me to act upon his suggestion and go straight back to town, but for the memory of that voyage home, and the almost womanly tenderness with which he had nursed a confoundedly irritable invalid. After that evening, I began to have a suspicion that he had gone too far to retreat, and that he couldn't have broken with St. Just if he would; but why it was that he refused me his confidence, I do not know. I'm afraid I was too calmly superior and self-righteous in my well-meant warnings. Ah! among the sins and follies of youth a man has to repent of, the memory of his beggarly little virtues is sometimes the bitterest.

"Our little difference seemed to have been forgotten next day, and Considine spoke to me in his usual manner. I did not see much of him though, and it went on for several days. But I will not trouble you with the details. I don't know if Considine lost much more money. I fancy not; but he never went to bed sober; and of all the wild, reckless set gathered in the smoking-room at Walford every night, he was the wildest and most reckless.

"The hunting season began. St. Just offered to mount us both, and we stayed on. I was more determined than ever not to go without Considine, and though very well aware that my host had had enough of my company, I ignored the fact, and received his cool courtesies with the best grace I could.

"You know the sort of hunting country it is down in Meadshire—small fields, high hedges, very little grassland, and covers all close together—not the best place in the world for a forty minutes' run; and yet the South Meadshire hounds always came out first at the end of a season, and St. Just declared he would not change his quarters for anything. He himself rode well; a bit recklessly, perhaps, but I never want to see a better man across country. His stud was, taking it altogether, the best lot of horses I ever saw in any meeting stables; and Considine and I were well mounted.

"A good, bold horseman George always was, but his wild daring of those days made some of the hardest riders in the field hold their breath and shout a warning that was lost in the gallant rush of the little Irish hunter he rode to his fence. Two horses he completely knocked up in as many days, and even St. Just remonstrated. Considine pulled in a little, and I began to hope that after all we might escape without further mischief worked; but he so persistently avoided having anything to say to me in private, I

could not again introduce the subject of our leaving, save in the presence of others—and that I did not choose to do.

"I think we must have been there something like ten days before the —— end came. Considine had a letter that morning; I don't know from whom, or anything of the contents; I never did know, for he burnt it almost at once; but the writing was a lady's, and I saw his whole face darken as he read it, saw him hand it to St. Just with a little laugh and sneer, and realized, perhaps, for the first time, that I had already lost the George Considine who was once my friend.

"I took a heavy heart with me to cover-side that morning, Charlie. The hounds met at Walford, and found at Deepdene; the fox broke cover, and went away for Weston—a good run? Ay, I think it was the best I ever had, and longer by twenty minutes than the one to-day. A burning scent, breast high, and not a check all along. The pace the first two or three miles left all the stragglers behind, and the rest of us settled down into our saddles, and hardened our hearts. It was worth a man's while to live for such a morning as that. A soft, south wind and cloudy sky, a good horse under you, answering gallantly to voice and hand, the hounds on well ahead, close together as they could run, and far in the distance, widening in the long, steady stride of a race for life, the dark speck you knew to be the best old dog-fox of the season.

"Considine kept on my left hand as we went up Longbrook Valley. He was riding a clever little mare of St. Just's, a chestnut with a vile temper, which she displayed at her fences pretty frequently. Considine lost *his* temper once or twice; but he managed to get his own way with the little brute, and was in the first flight when the fox was headed and turned west again over the Wixhope common.

"My horse was getting a little winded then, and I knew I must ride carefully if I wished to see anything of the finish. Considine passed me. His mare had cooled down, and was going splendidly with a free yet steady gallop that left many a veteran in the rear. The pace increased as we neared the edge of the common and caught sight of Wixhope village, lying in the hollow, and the blue smoke wreaths curling up into the misty sunlight that had struggled through the bank of grey cloud above it. Down at the brook we left more than one good horse and rider—over a grass-field or two, through old Dobbs' farm-yard, we held on like grim Death, till a stiffer fence than any we had yet left behind made the best of us look to our girths and harden our hearts. I was no light weight at that time, and had some doubts as to whether my horse would do it; but a closer view showed me the ground was sound and there was nothing much of a drop, and I gave him his head. A warning shout rang in my ears: 'Hold hard, sir! not there—a bit higher up.' But my horse cleared it, fell, and recovered himself before I turned round in my saddle to glance behind.

"Some fifty yards lower down there was a tremendous drop, a wide, deep ditch, and bit of boggy ground, altogether the nastiest place you can imagine, and there Considine had jumped. He must have been mad to attempt it with a horse a bit tired. I suppose the mare cleared it, though, for she lay on the bank beyond the ditch. I saw his fair head down on the wet, red clay, a flashing out of white heels, as the mare struggled and got up, and I knew there was something awfully wrong.

"I believe I was the first to reach him; but, ere I could speak, half a dozen flasks were thrust into my hand, and half a dozen dismayed faces bending over the still, slight figure. St. Just's voice stilled the momentary confusion. 'Is that you, Forbes? come here. Stand back, please, gentlemen. It is fortunate that we have a doctor at hand.'

"Some of them moved away, and Forbes, the Wixhope surgeon, strode up. A big, rough-looking fellow he was, with the voice and touch of a woman. I knelt, with George's head on my arm, while he went to work. He looked up at me in a minute or two, and shook his head. 'Can't do anything; he is dying. No, don't try to move him; it will not last long.'

"Something else he said; but I neither heard nor heeded more. They moved still farther away, the other fellows, and stood staring at each other in silence and dismay. I think St. Just was beside me; I heard him speak to the doctor once or twice, but I hadn't a thought to give him. I saw nothing but the white face upturned to the dull grey sky, and the crushed, motionless figure that blast of horn or ring of horse-hoofs would never wake to life and vigour again.

"I have always been thankful, Charlie, that there was a momentary interval of consciousness before the end came. I felt a slight pressure from the hand in mine. Considine opened his eyes. I had to bend down very low to catch the broken words, and St. Just, with instinctive courtesy, moved away, a look on his face I had never seen before. If his remorse and sorrow were but a passing feeling then, I know that when his own time came to die, George Considine's name was the last on his lips.

"'I'm done for, Jack,' he muttered brokenly. 'I had always hoped to die in battle; this is almost as good—eh? Tell—tell her—is that her little hand in mine?—No, no, I tell you, St. Just!' He tried to raise himself. 'Gone away! is it? What does he say? Ware wheat, gentlemen, ware wheat! Out of the way there—steady, lad—steady ——'

"It was a death no man need fear to die, Charlie, out under the quiet sky, the green fields round, your head on mother Earth; hushed, friendly voices you will never hear again floating in on your dulled senses, and some strong, faithful hand holding yours till the last. Considine died peacefully, as a brave man should, a smile on

his lips, and his eyes still seeking mine even in the little struggle which, thank God, did not last long."

"Yes, yes, they ran to earth at Austey Wood, and found again there. This wine is rather muddy, eh, old fellow?"

Was it?—or were the keen, dark eyes—that a few weeks back had faced death so calmly, measuring distances so well, in the hand-to-hand encounter with a dozen desperate foes, and Major Kenyon, fighting his way back to his men, had won his Victoria Cross—were they filled with tears?



SONG.

Dost thou love me?—Oh, no, no,
  Love is not like this!
Some may come and love may go,
Fading as a wreath of snow—
  Fleeting as a kiss!
Love is not a thing for ever,
Twining nearer, changing never.
  Clasp it for a happy minute,
Lightly dream it is thine own;
  Taste the joy that flutters in it,
Clasp it closer, it is gone!
Dost thou love me? No, no.
    Ah! no, no.

Dost thou love me? Yes! ah, yes,
  With a changeless faith;
Eager as a saint to bless,
Fond as mother's first caress,
  Resolute as death!
This is love, the true ideal,
Love that *thou* hast made the real,
  This is love, the old, old story,
Sunlight of the heart and eye,
  Filling earth and sky with glory;
Happy earth and happy sky!
Dost thou love me? Yes! ah, yes,
    Ah! yes, yes!

E. A. H.



ROBERT BARNES. R. AND E. TAYLOR

THE BLUE-RIMMED JAR.

THE ARGOSY.

AUGUST, 1882.

MRS. RAVEN'S TEMPTATION.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "DR. HARDY'S MARRIAGE."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A SECRET AND A SIGNET RING.

FRANK RAVEN, admitted at last to Daylight Villa, within the doors of which the "Oriental Mystery" at present abode, followed the girl into the dreary and darkened little parlour. Scarcely was he seated, before the "Oriental Mystery" entered.

It certainly seemed her pleasure to remain a mystery. Frank saw before him a tall woman of a massive figure, who advanced into the room with a noiseless, gliding step. He could distinguish little more, for on her head she wore a large veil of coarse black lace, whose heavy edge fell about her face so closely that her eyes only glittered through it, and nothing of her visage was seen, except the nose and the thin, but large and loose, lips. Still, she reminded him of somebody or something.

She spoke no greeting. She crossed the room in silence, and seated herself in an arm-chair which stood about four feet from Frank.

"You are come," she said then, in a low, deep voice. "I thought you would."

"What can you know of me?" asked Frank, who felt aware that his pulse beat a little heavily.

"What do you know of yourself?" she returned, in the same tone. "Shall we call you Frank Raven, of Ravenscourt? That is what your friends call you, you know."

"What do you mean?" he inquired. It struck him that perhaps she had reason to expect two strange visitors that morning, and was employing a little ruse to find out which of the two was before her.

"What I say," she answered, coolly. "Look into your own heart. What does that say? It doesn't deceive you. What it says is true."

"But this is gibberish," retorted Frank. "It may mean anything or nothing. You cannot expect me to believe it has any meaning."

Could it be that some genuine emotion thrilled the woman as she sat before him, or was she only enacting the rôle of her craft? It seemed to Frank as if something like a sob ran through her.

"You have never known a mother's love," she said, in a whisper. "Poor little mite! in your silks and velvets!"

"You are wrong," said loyal Frank. His inmost heart echoed back her words, but he chose to think she meant him to understand that she believed his mother to be dead.

"Have you, then, ever known a mother's love?" she asked sharply, with a stern emphasis on the question. "You need not answer—except to yourself."

And Frank was silent. "What else do you wish to say to me?" he asked, coldly.

"I see the house where you have lived all your life until recently," she resumed. "It is a great house, standing among ancient trees; and it is full of servants who think there is nobody in the world like you Ravens. I see the Squire who is dead but lately. I see you toddling after him, and he taking you up and kissing you. I see you with him when you get on to be a growing lad. He might scold you sometimes—he always loved you."

Frank put a stern restraint upon himself. He would ask her no question, but he looked at her earnestly. How did she know all these things? She spoke with an assumption of power, as though her knowledge were unlimited. Was it possible she would have aught to say about his father's strange will? She went on:

"I can tell you about some of your servants—those who have been long with you, and whose lives have grown to be almost as a part of the family. There is an old white-haired man-servant, whom the dead Squire liked and trusted. There is a woman-servant, whose heart is very warm and kind—but I don't think she cares much for Mrs. Raven. Then there is a little old woman about the house—stay, is she altogether a servant?"

Frank had set his mind against answering questions. "Say what you think yourself," was his only reply.

"Well, I think she was a servant once," rejoined the woman; "a superior servant. She is not a sweet-looking person—nor always sweet-tempered. She was very fond of the late Squire, and she is very fond of you. I see her—I see her—watching you—always watching you. It is the morning of your going away—stay. Yes, I see her standing in your room; she is handing you a newspaper——"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Frank, at last startled from his reserve by the recollection of that morning, the one of his departure from Ravenscourt; when Charity Hale had come into his room with the county newspaper. Certain facts concerning the household might be patent to a wide public, but how could a little private scene like that become known?

"Ay," said the woman, with a sudden change of manner; quite different from that which she had hitherto shown. "That stirs you, does it?"

"Of course I am puzzled to imagine how you can know these things," acknowledged Frank.

"Ah, you perceive I do know things, then! Do you wish me to go on and tell you all I know?"

"I suppose you had best tell me what it was that made you wish to see me," answered Frank.

"Shall I tell you who it is that will be your wife?" she asked.

Frank was sorely vexed that he could not keep a tell-tale red flush from mounting to the very roots of his hair. A curious self-consciousness was stirring his heart.

"You are not able to tell me that," he rejoined. "Probably I shall never have a wife."

The woman laughed faintly. "You young men all say that. Especially when your heart tells you who it is you would like to have."

What should he do? He hated to think that by his means—through his being there—Alice Cleare should be commented upon by this obscure and crafty woman. How could he stop it? He sat in silence, inwardly writhing.

"I see her. She is tall and slim"—and Frank had very nearly burst in here with the interruption, She is not tall. "There is gold in her hair. It is like the old red gold that frames the miniatures, which I see hanging in an oak cabinet in Ravenscourt. Her initials——"

"You are talking nonsense," interrupted Frank: "and it is nonsense which I do not like, because it seems almost like an insult to ——"

"The initials of her name are an E. and an A." quietly continued the woman.

"Eh—what?" exclaimed Frank, taken by surprise, as he perceived it was not Alice Cleare.

"You do know one whose initials are E. and A. Ay, I perceive so. And there is your wife that is to be."

"You are entirely wrong," spoke Frank, hotly.

"Am I? You know what you know: but you do not know all. There is a threatening ghost that walks in the grounds at Ravenscourt—that does not matter much, there are ghosts walking about most grand houses, if people's eyes are open to see them. The young lady with the gold in her hair can lay that ghost for you: and you, and for that reason, will marry her."

Frank's mind was in a state of bewilderment.

"And when you have married her the ghost will cease to walk in Raven Park, and that strange old woman in the court-corridors will be at rest, and even Mrs. Raven"—and here there was a drawl as of contempt in her voice—"may learn to love you!"

"I don't know what you are talking about," stammered Frank:

but there was sufficient method in her vaticinations to make his ears tingle as he heard them. "And I don't believe you know yourself," he added, bluntly, pricking up his scattered wits.

The woman laughed. It sounded to Frank a cruel, defiant, ironical laugh. She rose up. Frank also sprang to his feet.

"I have told you nothing but nonsense, you say! Beware that you do not, in your foolhardiness, make an enemy of one who knows what I know—what I can tell you!"

A hundred ideas chased each other through Frank Raven's mind. Did she hope to extort money? Was she going mad?—it was not unlikely that a perverted mind such as hers, should suddenly lose its balance, he thought.

"Nobody knows anything of me which they are not free to proclaim to the whole world," he said to her steadily.

"You are brave, young man," she answered "brave, because you think your secret is safe in your own breast. For it is a secret which you may well say nobody has ever told you."

"I don't understand you in the least," declared Frank. "I have no secret." And he must have been a very good actor if he could have spoken an untruth so truthfully. Still this woman did not appear to believe him.

"Then I will speak out to you," she suddenly said, almost fiercely, "and you will wish you had heard and heeded me, without forcing me to that. There are truths which must be known to our innermost hearts, but which should never be breathed aloud. You are not the late Squire Henry Raven's son: you are not the son of Mrs. Raven."

Frank stood before her as one petrified. For the first time, she began to believe in his assertion of utter unconsciousness concerning the revelation she had to make. Her words seemed to have stunned him like an unexpected blow.

"There!" she said, in a strangely subdued tone, "you would have it out. I could not help it. It is not my fault."

"How dare you say this?" he burst forth. "Have you no thought of the evil you would do—of the wrong inflict by such words? But, pardon me for saying you have convicted yourself, for if you know one truth, you should know all. Your belief that I knew this already is false; it serves to show how little I need trouble myself about the rest."

"*Yet it does trouble you*," she answered, in a low voice.

"Yes, it does trouble me," he said, turning upon her with a vehemence so sharp that she actually started. "An evil thought—an evil suggestion—is always troublesome. It may not be dangerous; it may be scarcely harmful, but it disturbs the spirit."

"Most evil things do that. Nevertheless, we must sometimes encounter them. My motive was only good," she continued, gazing at Frank strangely, her tone almost a humble one, as though some

doubt were swaying her. "I have not told you a lie—but the very truth, whether you knew it before or not."

"You declared positively that I did know it; and what you say now may be as true as that declaration was."

"I thought you must know it; I thought you could not fail to know it. Go back to whence you came, and ask Mrs. Raven if she believes you to be her son."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," he answered, indignantly. "My mother is sad and solitary enough, without being annoyed with absurdities such as these."

The woman drew herself back. He thought she looked strangely like a serpent going to spring. The resemblance grew stronger, as her next words came from between her teeth with a hiss.

"Did the late Squire Henry Raven make such provision for you as a favourite son might have expected?"

That blow told. Frank for the moment lost the reserve he had hitherto maintained. "The will my father made was natural enough," he said. "He simply trusted me to my mother during her lifetime."

The woman came a step nearer to him. "Suppose," she whispered, "suppose that he had reason to hope that long before Mrs. Raven's death you would have taken the advice I have given you to-day?—the advice about your wife that is to be? That will was dated very shortly before he died—is it not so?"

"That is true," admitted Frank.

"If he could have spoken to you between the making of that will and his death, how do you know what he might have told you? or what he might have bidden you to do?" she asked, in the same strange, low, yet clearly-audible voice which somehow seemed to make Frank's flesh creep.

"He is speaking to you *now*," she went on solemnly. "You will not heed me: so he shows himself to me, and bids me describe him to you. He is standing at your right side now. He is a tall man, with a pleasant, country face and iron-grey hair. He—yes, he has an imperfection in one front tooth. He puts his left hand on your right shoulder: he wears a ring—a large cornelian stone in a heavy gold setting. It has a figure engraved on it. He holds it so that I can see it. It is a woman, a sort of goddess, with a horn of plenty in her hand. Hist! He lets it fall. What was that sound?"

Frank started. Something had undoubtedly fallen with a chink against the leg of a chair. In the shadowy light and with swimming head, he stooped to grope for it. There it was: his dead father's ring! There was no mistaking that familiar jewel—an ancient heir-loom—which he had played with as a baby, and had sometimes been let take off his father's finger to put for a minute on his own during his boyhood.

Nothing within the range of Frank's imagination could have struck

him with a sense of horror so ghastly as this—the sight, the touch of that ring, with its homely, happy memories.

"How did this come here?" he gasped.

"How should I know?" the woman returned; and she was bending forward to look at the ring as curiously as he. "I was but describing what I saw with the second sight. Do you know the ring? It seems to be the one I have just seen on the late Squire Raven's finger."

"Yes," said Frank, almost reluctantly, "it is the one my father always wore."

He pressed his hand upon his perplexed brow. What could the mystery be? He knew that Leonard had had charge of it since his father's death, but where it had been kept he did not know. Leonard had placed it on his own finger, as of right; but it was too large, it fell off, and so he did not wear it.

"Don't you believe me now? And won't you heed me?" she demanded.

"It only makes it all the more strange—more mysterious," he answered; "it does not follow that it is more truthful. Who are you? Where do you come from?"

"Is not my message enough?" she asked. "What need have you to think of the messenger?"

"The greatest need," he replied promptly. "If I could find out who you are, I might discover how you get your knowledge of our affairs. For when you tried to penetrate farther than external facts with me, you failed. You were quite wrong in your guess about my knowing any secret."

"As you please. I was not wrong about E. A.," she added quickly. "Your father beckons to her. He wants you to stand side by side—hand in hand. If you do not ——"

"What has my father to do with it?"

"I cannot say. If you ——"

"You have just said he was not my father."

"If you do not comply with his wishes, there will be trouble and scandal and disgrace; and perhaps wrong will triumph and right go to the wall. If you do, all will be peace and quietness—peace and quietness."

"Good can never come by doing harm," said Frank. "I judge of your message by what it would enjoin on me. A man can never do a meaner thing than marry a woman he does not love."

"You can but obey."

"Never," said Frank, calmly. "To him, my dead father, I could only say what I should have said to my father living—that not even for his sake could I play the traitor to my own heart—my own soul."

The next moment he felt angry with himself for speaking so under such circumstances, and to such a woman as this must be. He took out his purse.

"Some relatives of mine who had an interview with you the other day parted from you in your debt," he said, coldly. "I presume I also owe you something for our conversation to-day. Do you consider that I ought to pay for the advertisement you inserted in the newspaper, urging that your message to me should be delivered? Please to name what sum will satisfy you."

"I will not take one farthing," she said, in a tone as chilly as his own. "Neither from them nor from you. Rely upon that."

"Pardon me if I do not thank you," answered Frank. "I would prefer to pay you."

She turned her face full upon him. Her eyes glittered under the heavy black veil. "And I prefer the account between us to stand open," she said, smiting her hand on the back of a chair as she spoke.

"That is what I feel your conduct means," said Frank, with as much composure as he could command. "And I prefer not to keep open accounts. I think we have no more to say to each other. But it must be discovered who you are and where you come from, and I shall try my best at it. Good morning, madam."

"Stop," she cried. "Go back to the house you came from, Frank Raven, that of Mr. Connell, and go alone into the drawing-room. Against the wall, between the windows, stands a little table. On it are two china jars, or vases, containing pots with flowers growing in them. The flowers are, I think, geraniums, and the vases are alike, only one has a green rim and the other a blue one. Take up the *blue* one, remove the flower, and under the earth you will find a sealed envelope. It and its contents are for you."

"What are the contents?"

"That you will soon see. If they do not convince you that they come from a friend, from one to whom your welfare is worth something, and whose advice is not cheaply given, then nothing else will, and you must go to your doom. Beware! I say it to you for the second time. You stand to-day where two roads branch off, roads that are not likely to meet again. Take heed which you choose, if you care that the future should be well with you. And now go, for I can do no more."

Frank slightly bowed his head, cast back a parting glance at the strange figure standing motionless in the gloom, and obeyed. Halting on the doorstep, he considered what he should do next. The woman would no doubt understand that he meant to institute an inquiry. Perhaps his declaration had been over-candid—but Frank liked to be open in all he did. Not even an enemy would be taken an unfair advantage of.

Did he expect to find anything in the china pot in Mrs. Connell's drawing-room? He did not know. After that incident of the ring, he was prepared for any marvel. That ring—that ring! He had placed it on his finger unhindered by the woman. But for that ring, he should already, in the open sunshine and fresh air, have begun

to think of the whole affair as a common mystification and humbug. But this testified to a real mystery.

Frank glanced at his watch. A train would be leaving Coltburn Station in less than half an hour. There would not depart another till nearly three hours later. This woman must be very rapid in her movements if she could take flight so readily, but such a contingency must be provided against—and his mind was made up.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WITH THE DETECTIVES.

FRANK RAVEN moved off the doorstep and walked quickly towards the police station. He had noticed it when with Philip the previous day. He wanted the services of a detective to watch the departing train and Daylight Villa.

He was shown into a bare room, and did not wait for two minutes. His card, on which he had scribbled "urgent," and which bore "Ravenscourt, Hants," engraved on the corner, brought two efficient officers into his presence immediately.

Probably Frank seemed a little haughty in his awkwardness and his haste. But if so, it did not repel those two experienced men. They glanced at each other the moment they saw Frank, silently, as it were, exchanging thoughts. This would be a good case of some sort. It was no frivolous "fast" business which had brought to them this young aristocrat, with his open brow and clear eyes. Frank remembered the speedily-departing train, and lost no time in introducing the business, and strove to be as brief and lucid as he could.

There was one officer who spoke, and one officer who watched. Both had note-books.

"There is a woman in this town calling herself the 'Oriental Mystery,'" began Frank. "Have you heard of her?"

"Certainly, certainly: her placards are on all the walls."

"She stays at Daylight Villa," added Frank.

"Yes, yes," returned the speaking officer, as though all this were superfluous; "she gives that address."

"I think it exceedingly likely that she may make a speedy flight by the next train," said Frank; "if so, I want it to be ascertained where she goes."

The officer did not seem quite so attentive to this as he had been to the preceding remarks; but he gave a slight inclination of the head, to signify that he had heard. Then he turned to his companion and said a few rapid words, in the cursory tone in which one inquires whether a fire is being kept up, or gives any similar trifling direction. The silent officer crossed the room, opened a door and disappeared for a few seconds. He came back, still in silence. Frank heard footsteps pass down the passage outside, even while he

repeated the request—the urgency of which he feared had not been fully comprehended.

"Yes, yes," repeated the officer, "that can be easily done. But of what do you suspect her, or accuse her? Of course we must know that; or, as you may be aware, we should have no right to proceed."

"Well, she—she is certainly a fortune-teller," observed Frank, who suddenly found himself rather at a loss. "I have just been to her."

The officer smiled. "What did she do?" he inquired.

"She professed to describe the dead; and she detailed particulars of my past and present history," explained Frank.

"Good," said the officer, writing. "And she demanded money for this, as a matter of course?"

"No," dissented Frank, "she demanded none; she even refused it when I offered it to her."

The officer put down his book. "Then I don't see what we can do for you, if this was all. Do you, Mr. Cran?" he asked, turning to his colleague. "People may tell any fabulous tales they please, if they do it simply for the love of the thing."

"Perhaps this was not all?" gruffly spoke Mr. Cran. If it had been all, neither of them saw why the young man should come to them.

"Did she merely describe the dead to you; or did she profess to call up a figure of it to your sight?" asked the other.

"She only described it."

"But that is what any of us could do. Well, sir, what else?"

Frank felt thoroughly nonplussed. The officers were watching him; they seemed inclined to be as eager as he in the matter, if they could only be shown what the matter was.

"Look at that ring," he said, holding out his hand. "That belonged to my dead father; and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it was safely locked up at Ravenscourt, in Hampshire, under my brother's keeping. Yet, during this woman's professed description of my dead father just now, this ring drops—from somewhere—at my feet. Is that anything you can go upon?"

The note-books were busy again. "That will do for a beginning, sir," said Frank's chief interrogator. "The fact of possession has to be accounted for, you see. Of course she may have become possessed of it in some legitimate way that you know nothing of. Did she describe your dead father accurately, or not?"

"Quite so," replied Frank.

"Possibly she had seen him during his lifetime?"

"Well—yes—possibly. But I do not see how she could have come at other things she said."

"And you want to find this out. Well, Mr. Raven, as you have come to us, and you, of course, understand that we cannot work in the dark, you will not object to answer a few questions, will you? Of course you speak to us in confidence."

"I will answer everything I can," readily assented Frank. "But, in the meantime, I'm afraid that first train from Coltburn will have started, and she will have got her chance of leaving the town."

"Oh, that's all right," said the officer, re-assuringly. "One of our men was sent to the station at once. And now to business. You never saw this person before to-day, sir?"

"Never, to my knowledge," answered Frank.

"And what made you go to her?"

"I went partly to oblige some friends of mine," said Frank. "They had seen her, and had been puzzled by her; and, in her interview with them, she described me, and said she wished to see me. I dare say I should not have gone, but one of the young ladies had got nervous about the woman, and I really went hoping to bring back proofs that she was but a chattering impostor. And so that's how it was."

"And had this woman anything special to tell you, sir?"

"She told me something—something which she believed I knew as a secret."

"And ——?" both listeners were waiting intently for the answer.

"It was something I had never heard of—something I believe to be entirely false," said Frank.

"Can you tell us what it was?"

"I would rather not—unless it is absolutely necessary. I believe it is false, utterly and absolutely. In fact, a made-up lie."

"Nothing more likely, sir. Only the form of the lie might help us to search for its source, as well as for the rest of the information and the possession of the ring—all of which are puzzling you."

"Was this information—this secret—given with a view of tendering you any advice?" spoke up the silent Mr. Cran.

Frank started. This man had been hitherto so nearly mute, that his voice, at once touching the right key, sounded like that of an oracle. The detective noticed the start, and thought within himself that with a little extra knowledge of human nature and the world, anybody could set up for a witch.

"It was," said Frank, answering the question with a slight hesitancy, for he detested the thought of Evelyn Agate as a possible wife.

A short pause ensued. And when the next question came, Frank began to wonder whether these men had the power to read people's thoughts, as the woman professed to have.

"On the subject of marriage, probably?" spoke the reticent Mr. Cran.

"Y—e—s," said Frank, trying to look cool and unconcerned.

"Excuse me, sir," said the detective, "but have you any idea of following the advice offered you?"

"Certainly not," said Frank, sharply.

"And this secret, that she thought you knew, she called a fact, I presume? Was it of grave import?"

"She called it a fact: and it was very grave indeed. It was very disagreeable indeed, and I must keep it to myself for that reason," added candid Frank, "false though I am sure it is. There's the ring."

"Yes, there's the ring," admitted the officer, his tone a slighting one—"and it is in your possession now. So, however it got into hers, presuming that it did get into it, it ——"

"Why, of course it got into it," interrupted Frank.

"However that may have been, it has found its way back to its lawful owner."

"Scarcely," answered Frank. "It belongs to my elder brother, not to me. Other property may have passed out of the Court, which might not be readily missed—or so easy to recognise as this ring."

"And you can be quite sure—pardon the inquiry, but we find such strange mistakes do happen—that this ring could not have been about your own person when you entered Daylight Villa?"

"As sure as I can be of anything. I had never seen it since about the time of my father's funeral."

"Well, what you wish, Mr. Raven, is that we should discover the antecedents of this woman. We will do our best. I presume there is no objection to our pushing our inquiries in any direction which seems advisable—down at your place, Ravenscourt, for example, whence the ring appears to have come?"

"My brother's place, not mine," corrected Frank. "No, I see no objection. Of course, I have not yet had much time to consider matters. I came here straight from Daylight Villa, because there was not a moment to be lost."

"You are staying in Coltburn?"

"Yes, at my uncle's—the Rev. James Connell. I may add," said Frank, as he rose to leave, "that this woman made another communication to me, which I can verify or falsify on my return to his house. If I find it true, I shall think the rest all the more strange."

"Should we have anything special to communicate, you will get a note from us. Good-day, sir."

The detective bowed him out, and then went back to his silent colleague.

"What that woman told him is true," said the oracular Cran. "I only wonder what it was."

"You don't mean to say he knew it was true!" exclaimed the other, with genuine incredulity. "I don't believe it, Cran. I never heard truth spoken at all if he was not speaking it when he said he was sure it was a lie."

"You are rash, Jones," corrected Mr. Cran. "Of course, he was sure; thought he was. People never do believe the truth: it's not in human nature. I didn't say the young fellow was telling a lie: he is not the sort to do it. Don't jump to conclusions."

Jones pulled out his watch and looked at it. "The train is off by this time," he remarked, "and our man ought soon to be back."

Mr. Cran walked into the outer room to await him. He did not have to wait long—"our man," who looked like a quiet, simple country shopman, came in.

"Train off—and party did not go," was his brief report.

Mr. Cran put on his hat. "I am going to Daylight Villa myself, Jones," said he. "There is more in all this than meets the eye."

And as Frank hastened to Mr. Connell's house, among his many crowning thoughts, there cropped up the quaint reflection that until this interview with the detectives, he had never realised that silent listening might be elevated into one of the fine arts.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE BLUE-RIMMED JAR.

When Frank Raven reached the house, it was the younger servant, Julia, who admitted him. Her eyes were still red after the scolding Minton had administered to her in the retirement of the kitchen, and she answered Frank's questions in the subdued tone of one who only hopes not to be found fault with.

"Mr. Philip was out," she said, "and so was Miss Louisa." Their papa had taken them with him to drive to the house of a gentleman in the country, and were not expected back until the evening.

"How is Mrs. Raven, now?" questioned Frank.

"No better, sir," answered the girl; "at least Minton thinks so. The mistress has been with her nearly all the morning, and so has Miss Agate. She has quite set her mind on going back to Ravenscourt to-morrow, it's said, and Miss Agate is in a great state about her."

Frank stood in the hall, bewildered. What was he to do next? He would like to make his search in the drawing-room at once, and he had wanted Philip to be with him, not caring to make it alone. He turned towards the dining-room, expecting to find that apartment empty, for this was the hour when Miss Cleare and her pupils usually took their daily exercise. But he was mistaken. Seated in the large bow window, beside the big myrtle, on which Mrs. Connell prided herself, with a mass of white work, streaming from her knee to the floor all around her, was Alice Cleare. Children, and all else, seemed to be out.

She raised her head as the door opened. Her face was smiling. When she saw it was Frank, the smile faded into a look of earnest interrogation, prepared to patiently go unanswered. He could see at once that the remarks he had made to her had not passed unheeded from her mind.

"I have done what you advised us all not to do," he said, with a sort of candid desperation. "I have been to see the witch—the Oriental Mystery."

"I thought that was the matter in hand," she said directly. "I felt quite certain that the others saw her when they went to the Cave; it was only likely you would be interested and go in your turn."

"It cannot be said that I went out of mere interest," Frank answered, gravely. "I can scarcely tell you why I went, Miss Cleare, without interfering with other people's secrets. But I did go; and I found a very strange woman, and heard a very strange story, and saw some very strange things."

He paused there, not caring to mention the ring. Frank shrank from offering Alice Cleare any half confidence, and whole confidence he could not yet give.

"She spoke to me concerning some matters unknown to me, and which I do not believe," he continued, "and she told me, as a test to her veracity and good faith, that I should find something in a certain place in this house on my return. She did not tell me what it was, only where I was to look for it. There is a table between the drawing-room windows—is there not?"

"Yes—a walnut-wood card table," answered Alice. "It is always kept closed, and is covered with books and ornaments. Miss Connell told me it had never once been used."

"Can you remember any of the ornaments on it?"

Alice shook her head. "They have been changed two or three times since I came here," she replied. "Some sketch books and albums usually lie on it; and I think some other things are there just now. Yes, I remember. A little table used to stand in the windows, supporting, each, a vase with a flower-pot in it. When your mother and Miss Agate were coming, Mrs. Connell thought those small tables might be handy in the bed-rooms; and she removed the vases and flower-pots to the card-table, and had the other tables taken upstairs."

"Can you describe the vases, Miss Cleare?"

Alice looked at him in some surprise as she reflected. "They have a white ground with coloured rims, and a wreath of roses running round the base."

"The woman spoke of these jars as not being quite alike: one had a green rim, she said, and one a blue one."

"It is quite possible," said Alice, hardly knowing whether to take all this seriously: "and very easy to ascertain. What about the flower-pots—and the rims?"

"I am to look in the blue-rimmed one," explained Frank, rising from the chair which he had taken while they talked. "Miss Cleare, may I ask you a favour?"

"Yes, certainly," she said. "If there's anything I can do for you?"

"Will you join me in this search: and see, with me, what I find, and where I find it? I am afraid there is some underhand work in all this," he hastened to add, in reply to her evident

surprise, "which must, if possible, be brought to light; and we know two pairs of eyes give surer evidence than one. I would not trouble you if Philip were at home, and I do not care to speak about the affair to my aunt, or any other part of the family."

"I will come, Mr. Raven."

"I'm not asking you to do anything you think wrong, I hope? I know how much you dislike secrets and mysteries."

Her sweet eyes looked into his with great sincerity. "I do not think it wrong," she assured him; "and I am not doing it out of any curiosity—or desire to pry into hidden things. I am doing it to help you to do what you feel is right. You do feel that, don't you?"

"I do—I do," said Frank, earnestly. "I cannot tell you much about this business yet, Miss Cleare; but there are false assertions (as I believe them) to be unmasked, and facts to be found out, and I have got to do it, if I can."

The drawing-room was in a flood of mellow sunshine. Straight before them, as they entered, stood the two china jars, and the one had a green rim and the other had a blue one. The geraniums, growing in the common red earthenware pots that the china jars held were luxuriant and beautiful. That which stood out of the green-rimmed vase had white blossoms; the other, scarlet.

"It was the blue-rimmed one she told me to look in," observed Frank, as he stood over the two. "Now for it."

He lifted the earthenware pot from the blue-rimmed vase. There was nothing beneath it, except a little damp mould.

"Nothing," he said, moving aside, to let Alice peep in, too, while he held up the red pot, and looked around it and beneath it, to make sure that nothing escaped him.

"Could she have meant you to look in the flower-pot itself?" asked Alice.

The question brought back to him the cold, hard voice of the woman, repeating her instructions, "beneath the flower." "I'm afraid she must have meant that," he said.

"These flowers were here before I came," Alice observed, as she watched him gently probing the mould with his finger.

A few minutes' experiment convinced him that it would be quite easy to turn the whole out without injuring the plant or breaking the pot. Alice looked round. She caught sight of an old newspaper, and quickly spread it on the ground, in front of the table. Frank held the pot and the plant poised lengthways in his two hands; he began to gently shake and draw it. Out it came at last, with a sudden jerk. A few tiny stones rattled down on the paper; something else also fell with a heavy thud. It was a sealed envelope, thick and white.

Alice stretched out her hands, and silently took the pot and the plant from Frank. She saw how pale his face had grown.

He picked up the packet. It had no superscription; but when he turned it over, he saw that it had been sealed with his father's ring; the red stone ring, which had dropped at his feet that morning at Daylight Villa, and which he now wore on his hand.

In a few hasty words he strove to convey to Alice some of the significance of this: but she hardly understood. She could gather at least that the woman had professed to deliver messages from his dead father, and that, first of all, the ring, and now this sealed packet, had been brought forward to ratify their truth. It was sufficient to startle and shock her.

"But you don't believe it?" she said. "Believe, I mean, that there can be in it anything supernatural?"

"No," answered Frank: "and yet ——"

"Don't open it," she quickly interposed; "don't proceed any farther in the matter, without taking such advice as you know your father would have liked to see you take."

"Whose advice can I seek?" he said, bewildered. "I cannot deal with this myself."

"Could you not ask it from Mr. Connell?" suggested Alice, as she carefully restored the displaced plant to its pot.

"Yes—I think I must," rejoined Frank, slowly. "Philip and he will come in together, I suppose. Under the circumstances, I could not speak to my uncle without first explaining to Philip, and getting his permission, as it were. Perhaps I have done too much without advice already. I went to the police."

"The police!" exclaimed Alice.

"I went to them upon quitting Daylight Villa, chiefly to ask them to keep an eye on this woman's movements, and, if possible, find out where she comes from, and what her connections are. I cannot deny, Miss Cleare, that she told me strange things, and *drew* stranger inferences from them. I wonder what can be in this envelope. It feels like money."

Alice Cleare touched it, and assented.

"I suppose," said Frank, confidentially, "that you feel sure you make no mistake in thinking the figure you saw in the garden the night before last resembled the figure you saw in the lane at Ravenstoke?"

"I think they were the same."

"The woman alluded to the ghost to-day," said Frank. "But, in truth, we have enough mystery just now without ghosts. That shriek here—which nobody owns to, and nobody can fathom: what do *you* think of that?"

"I try not to think about it," she answered cheerily. "There are so many things not to be understood or explained that it is easy to tolerate one more."

"But do you mean to say that you can keep from forming an opinion on these things?" asked Frank.

Alice shook her head. "Thoughts will come, you know," she said. "You see, there is at once a mystery to begin with: where do thoughts come from? One cannot help having thoughts: and sometimes we have some which we would rather be without."

"But won't you tell me the thoughts you have about this matter?"

"My fancies are of no value. If I had convictions, that would be different. You should be welcome to them."

"Thank you heartily for that," answered Frank. "You can't think how lonely I am—perhaps you can, though—perhaps that's why I don't mind owning it to you. I'm simply feeling about in the dark, without hand to lead me or friend to guide me; and there may be something in the path, ugly and evil, for me to stumble over. You don't know how a hint from you might help me. I have things to contend with that you know nothing of."

Tears filled Alice's eyes. "Oh, Mr. Raven, I wish you would not speak like this! Indeed I should like to help you—but how can I? How can I do what you ask? It would not be right! It seems to me it would be almost like beginning to try the practices of this woman."

"I feel more and more that you have something in your mind which you could tell me if you would," persisted Frank. "Cannot you feel it right to do so?"

Alice was crying now—those quiet, patient tears which Frank remembered at their first interview. He felt that his perplexities might be making him selfish and harsh.

"Forgive me," he said, gently, "I did not mean to oppress you with my burdens. I do not ask you to do what you think wrong. You would not do it, I know, neither would I ask it."

"If a thing is right to be done," sighed Alice, "there must be a right way to do it. I should like to say something to you. This is nothing that I fancy," she went on, "it is only that I should like to ask you always to remember that our true value lies in ourselves, and in what we make of life; and that we do risk our souls to gain the world when we turn aside from the path that we feel to be right and true, because it is not pleasant or easy. And oh, be very kind and pitiful," she continued, as an after-thought, "for if we are injured, those who injure us have injured themselves more; rely upon that. And whatever we have to let go, we need never be without God and something to do for Him."

"Thank you," said Frank. "*You* have found the right way to do the right thing." He did not exactly own it to himself then, but from that moment he felt the witch's story might be true: and also, that even so, it was bearable. He held out his hand, keeping the mysterious packet in the other.

"Tell me that I need never be without one friend," he said, pleadingly.

She took his hand in her firm, soft clasp, and held it there. Then, without a word, she went away, leaving Frank Raven gazing after her, his thoughts busy. "When the ghosts come," he whispered to himself, "surely the angels are not far off."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SEALED PACKET.

When the visiting party returned, Frank contrived to speak to Philip apart. And Philip was so much impressed by this first whisper as to hasten to secure themselves from interruption.

He followed Frank's narrative with an attentive interest almost as masterly as that which the detectives had shown. Frank did not tell him everything, but he was candid in his concealment, openly avowing that he did not communicate what secret the woman had told him, but only that she had been utterly wrong in declaring that she knew it already. "I hope you don't think I did wrong in speaking to the police," cried Frank. "You see, the slightest delay might have spoiled all by enabling the woman to get clear off."

"Wrong?" echoed Philip, "my dear fellow, you did quite right, and I am uncommonly glad you acted promptly, without waiting to consult me or anybody else. From what you state, this woman knows a great deal too much, and we must find out whence she derives her sources of information, and, if possible, the ends she has in view. The whole affair, as connected with this woman, is rather strange," he added, after a pause. "Why Louisa should be so nervous and excitable I cannot quite understand."

"If I speak to your father, may it not get her into trouble?"

"I'll take care of that," Philip answered. "The blame of the expedition shall lie between myself and Miss Evelyn Agate—who deserves the whole. It was she who in her crafty way pushed it on. And I will tell him—and it's the truth—that Louisa has had a better caution against such folly in the future than in any lecture he could give her. Allow me to take another look at that ring, Frank?"

Frank drew it from his finger, and put it into Philip's hand. He examined it narrowly—even to the hall-mark on the metal.

He shook his head as he returned it. "I thought it might be a cleverly got-up duplicate," he said; "but I see it is a genuine article. I suppose it is really your father's ring?"

"Here's a proof of it: the letter E, rudely engraved inside. You have heard of the old Squire Eldred: the ring belonged to him, and that stands for the initial letter of his name. There is no mistake, Philip, about its being the real ring."

"How on earth, then, did the woman become possessed of it!"

"That is one of the most puzzling of all the questions. You see I must disclose all this to your father."

Philip nodded.

"Yes, I think I ought to. For one thing, there is this packet. I do not wish to open it, except in Mr. Connell's presence. You seem to be testing its weight, Philip, as though you thought it contained gold."

"I must say it's heavy enough for it."

Frank sauntered to the window, and looked out. As he stood so, his back to Philip, he ran on, in a careless tone: "I ought to tell you also that I mentioned the matter to Miss Cleare—that I had been to see the Oriental Mystery. You were not in, you see, Philip, and she was; the only one about; and I was impatient to see whether there was anything in the flower-pot or not. She kindly went in with me, and saw me find it. I have told her just what I have told you, Philip."

Philip whistled softly. "Did you tell her that we had seen the woman first at the Cave?"

"No," said Frank, "she told me, so to say. She had felt sure you three went."

"Miss Cleare does not waste any love on Evelyn Agate."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Frank, nettled. "Miss Cleare is above petty antipathies, as it seems to me."

Philip laughed in his critical, aggravating way.

"If Miss Cleare did not dislike Evelyn Agate, she would not be Miss Cleare," he said, oracularly.

"Philip, I cannot understand one thing—your bad opinion of Evelyn Agate. If you hold it, why are you so friendly with her? Why, you flatter her up like anything!"

"I know that, my good friend. I should lead but a lonely life if I did not maintain pleasant terms with any people except those of whom I hold a high opinion."

"Don't you like her?"

"Do you?"

"Look here, Philip. Do you believe Evelyn Agate to be a designing woman?"

Philip threw a quick glance at Frank Raven. He had keen perceptive faculties. Was it quite unlikely that this strange girl with her tawny brown hair, her uncommunicative eyes and her missing antecedents, had set a seemingly supernatural machinery in motion to secure for herself some safe position at Ravenscourt? In short, was Miss Evelyn setting her innocent cap at Frank under the rose? Or—egad, thought Philip, and this is the most likely—at Frank's elder brother, the reigning squire? In that case, the accurate details of the witch's knowledge—nay, the mystery of the ring itself—became no longer mysterious.

"The sooner you see my father, the better, Frank," he said aloud. "He is at leisure now, I think. I will just reassure Louisa by telling her the police have taken the woman in hand; and then I'll go to him and pave the way for you."

"You are a good fellow to say that, Philip, for you know it will make it pleasanter for me."

Frank remained where he was—in Philip's bed-room. He tried to occupy himself with one of the quarterly journals lying about. But it would not do. Waiting and waiting, he thought Philip never would come back.

But that gentleman was doing his best to despatch his errands with his usual airy brevity. He had not found Louisa's mind quite so easy to "reassure" as he had imagined. His declarations that the witch had made an utter mistake in the matter of Frank, and had talked to him unintelligible nonsense, did not seem to calm her. She *would* go back to her own interview. If this woman had no truth to tell anybody else, then it was but the stranger she should have had something so much like truth to tell her. Philip listened to this, and listened to that, and leaped out of his bewilderment to the shrewd conclusion that his sister was thoroughly unhappy and unhinged, and that she had put forward the event of this woman and her mystifications, as a plausible cover for some far deeper, but less easily stated cause of uneasiness.

"She must have fallen in love," thought Philip. "Can it be with that quiet Italian?—and is she jealous of that other young woman, Evelyn, and their communings together in his language? A good thing if *she* would take up with the man!" And then Philip, giving no hint of his doubts, administered to his sister a sound lecture, intended as a tonic, and which might be good in any case.

With his father he knew he was on very different ground. The Rev. Mr. Connell had always been a strict disciplinarian, who had expected obedience and had generally got it. He remembered and realised the altered condition of his grown-up children far more than they did themselves. Probably his old authority held the stronger, through his reticence in commanding now. He would be sure to express his displeasure at what they had now done, but he would be all the more ready to hold to them a helping hand.

Philip found his father in his study—"the library," as Mrs. Connell always called it. It was a very comfortable room, in regard to furniture. For one thing, the element of choice and selection had entered here more largely than in any of the other apartments. For, to own the truth, in bygone, struggling days, much second-hand furniture, from Halls and Granges round, had found its way to the minister's house from many a rural sale. But when the stress of life's battle was over, and the minister's wife went to no more sales for what she wanted, but only for what she wished, it was odd what a good background these homely appurtenances made for bits of old oak, quaint china and even stained glass. If anything with an aristocratic aroma about it came in Mrs. Connell's way, there was no question as to its destination—straightway she carried it off to her husband's library. And so, the library grew

into a pretty, tasty, handsome room, Louisa's sketches adorning the walls, with other more pretentious paintings.

Mr. Connell had only been at home an hour, yet he was already deep in his beloved studies. He looked up from the manuscript over which he was bending when his son entered, not a shade of annoyance appearing on his worn face. Years ago, he had fully realised the special trials of the student temperament and life, its temptations to selfish seclusion, to irritability against interruption, to impatience with the common cares and vexations of existence, and had schooled himself to bear them bravely. Henceforth, whoever had wanted him, had always found him ungrudgingly ready.

Philip drew up his chair beside his father's, and at once secured his undivided attention by saying he was in a "bother," and had a story for his ear. Then he narrated it from the beginning, with as little of his own colouring and emphasis as possible, except that he dwelt strongly on Louisa's confusion and contrition for having gone, and on the impersonally kind motives which had at last induced Frank to visit the fortune-teller.

Mr. Connell heard him out with very few interruptions of question or remark. Like many ministers of religion, whose culture and devotion are equal to their opportunities, he had a wider range of experience than falls to the lot of men in other professions. He had seen many souls in extremity; he had explored the mazes of many a strange history. This had left him gentle and patient, and prepared for unlikely things, both in fact and in feeling.

Philip left nothing untold that he himself knew about Frank's visit, the mysterious appearance of the ring, and the discovery of the packet in the drawing-room. He said Frank would be sure to feel somewhat flurried and nervous whilst he went over the story later. And, when it was concluded, Philip rose to summon young Raven.

The minister rose too, and put his hand on his son's arm.

"I have not said one word of blame to you yet," he remarked, in his quietly impressive manner. "Those who stir dangerous water which they have been already warned against, need not be reminded of their mistake. I have no right to censure you. You know my opinions, Philip. But I fear lest you young people may think it is well you did what you did, as by that means you unearthed a plot of some kind which ——"

"It is well it is unearthed, father."

"Yes; but it might possibly have been unearthed another way. At present it seems to me, Philip, that you have simply followed the bait that was laid to lead you to the trap, whether or not you have yet fallen in."

"O yes, yes," said Philip, ruefully. "I see plainly enough we have just been following somebody's lead, and finding out the trumps in their hand by letting them take our tricks. Let me call Frank, sir. He is not the real offender, at any rate."

"No, probably he is only the victim," answered the minister, drily.

It was an immense relief to Frank to find his uncle so well prepared for the story he had to tell. He repeated it in haste, anxious to pass on to the secret portion he had hitherto kept to himself: which must be told and got over. The bare repetition of it seemed to him dishonouring to his dead father and to Mrs. Raven.

"That was not all, sir," he went on, after confirming in detail what Philip had stated. "The woman said she could tell me a secret which I knew: but which in fact I had never yet known or heard. She said—she said ——"

He stopped from emotion. Perhaps the half-expectant, half-amused smile on Philip's face served to restore his equanimity.

"Of course it was not true—but she told me I was the child of neither my father nor my mother."

The minister looked at him with a start. And evidently two or three thoughts or memories chased each other through his mind.

"Impossible," he said, shortly. "You are a Raven to the backbone, Frank. Not only do many a tone and gesture remind me of my brother-in-law, but you are really oddly like some of the old family portraits—my wife has mentioned one in particular. She noticed the resemblance the moment she saw you."

"Of course it was absurd," said Frank, hurriedly, with a choking sensation in his breast. "But, backed up by the descriptions she gave, and above all by that ring, it naturally made an impression on me."

"Naturally," said the minister; "but I think, Frank, you need have no fear on that score. And, now, shall we proceed to open this packet?"

He did not attempt to take it from Frank's hand, which he saw trembled in touching it. Frank pointed silently to the impression on the seal before he broke it, then at his ring. He carefully lifted out the contents upon the table.

There were three small tube-like enclosures, twisted up in silver paper. And each tube was composed of coins. They were golden coins; sovereigns; and there were fifty of them.

But while Mr. Connell peered at them with short-sighted doubtfulness, Frank caught sight of something still in the envelope. It was a small slip of paper, with some words upon it. They almost took the breath from him, the handwriting was so like his father's —and their purport made the colour rush to his face and then suddenly leave it. He thrust the paper hastily into his pocket, and Mr. Connell at least had never seen it or his action.

"It is very strange," mused the minister. "Philip, what do you think of it?"

"I can't tell what to think just yet, sir. Wish somebody would forward me a few rouleaus of the same sort."

"The sooner this is investigated, the better," said Mr. Connell. "I will myself accompany you both now to the police office. There

must be some deep plot laid; and somebody evidently has much to gain by its success."

They went out together saying nothing of where they were going. The way to the station lay chiefly through dark and lonely streets: but Frank felt as if none could be too dark or too lonely to be haunted by a spy or a conspirator.

All three gentlemen sent in their cards, and they were not kept waiting a moment. The taller and more communicative detective, Mr. Jones, came immediately. He greeted the well-known minister with cordial respect, but showed himself quite prepared to talk about the weather until the real object of their visit was led up to by Frank.

"Well, I have news; and I have none," answered Mr. Jones, genially. "The woman did not go away by the train. But she is gone. From all we can gather, she must have left Daylight Villa almost before you reached this place here in the morning."

"And can nothing more be done," asked Frank, almost irritably, with a sudden recollection of much that he had heard about the incompetency of the police.

"Ah," said Mr. Jones, quite graciously, "we are doing our very best. The person you saw here this morning, Cran, has taken it in hand himself. *He* will not fail if there's a chance of succeeding."

"And has she left no clue whatever behind her?" questioned Philip, speaking for the first time.

"None," said the detective. "In fact, the people of the house did not know she had gone until our man inquired for her. At least, they said so, and we have every reason to believe they spoke the truth. They asked him indoors quite readily, and hunted through the house for the woman. Her dinner was being cooked. Then they made angry lamentations over her running off without paying, and it was our man himself who found a paper on the mantleshelf in the parlour with cash in it, which the landlady said was quite sufficient to cover her debt."

"Plenty of money, seemingly," murmured Mr. Connell.

"One would hardly expect the woman to have a conscience about such matters," remarked Philip.

Mr. Jones shook his head. "It may not be conscience," he observed. "It may be to reduce the number of people interested in discovering her."

"Ah, that's it," said Philip. "But had she not any luggage—anything belonging to her?"

"Yes, she had. She had a heavy portmanteau, which they said was quite a tight fit on the narrow staircase, and they could not understand one person's getting it down without making any sound. The servant-girl was prepared to swear that it was standing safe in the bed-room when she made the bed this morning. Certainly it is not there now, or anywhere in the house, for they gave us every facility

for search. They say the strongest man could not have carried it far, unaided."

"Then some vehicle must have been hired!" exclaimed Frank, rising in his eagerness.

"Gently, sir," said the detective. "That was our natural conclusion, too: but we find that no licensed vehicle in this town has been hired for any such purpose to-day. Inquiries are now being made among carmen, porters, and others. In the meantime, it is our Mr. Cran's inference that the portmanteau was removed before to-day."

"And therefore that the servant is in the conspiracy?" suggested Philip.

"Not necessarily, sir. She may say she saw the portmanteau this morning, and may believe it to be the truth. She had seen the portmanteau and *she expected to see it.* It is the hardest matter to get absolute accuracy about things which custom has made mechanical. Can you be sure you put your umbrella in the stand this morning? If you found it in the corner of your bed-room instead, could you swear you had not put it there?"

They all admitted the difficulty.

"We imagine that some preparation was made for this apparently sudden departure," resumed Mr. Jones. "You see we are obliged to lay down certain lines of theory to help us to work at all." He seemed to await a question. Philip put it.

"Do you mean that you think this woman would have left Coltburn all the same had Mr. Frank Raven not visited her?"

The detective bowed. "We do," he said. "We have a certain reason—a slender one, perhaps—for thinking so."

He drew towards him a small iron case which lay on the table, and unlocked it with a key hanging to his watch-chain. From it he took a card whereon a few pieces of torn and crumpled paper were pasted together, with small irregular gaps between them. They seemed like the remains of the back of an envelope, with part of a superscription. He held it towards Frank, who read from the jagged fragments.

"Fr— Ra—n, Esq.,
"At Rev. J. —nell's,
"Roman R—
"Coltburn."

Frank felt his face flush again. For this writing had the same ghastly resemblance to his father's hand which the enclosure in the packet bore.

"Have you ever seen that writing before?" asked the detective, with an easy manner.

"Yes—I think so," Frank stammered, conscious that Mr. Jones was keenly watching him.

"Do you remember where you saw it, sir?"

"Yes, indeed. I did not know whose it was," curtly added Frank, as if he wished the subject to be dropped.

"Of course it is at your own option to answer questions or not, sir," returned Mr. Jones; "but if you want us really to serve you, you cannot give us too much confidence. Things which may seem unimportant in your eyes may be most valuable clues in ours. By the way, you said, I think, that you had some inquiry to follow out in this gentleman's house."

"Yes," admitted Frank; adding with a great effort: "And that was how I saw this handwriting."

And then he narrated the verbal instructions he had received from the woman concerning the hidden packet, its finding, and its contents. "There was a scrap of paper put in with the gold," he concluded, "bearing a word or two upon it."

But what those words were, he still did not say. Mr. Connell glanced at him anxiously, but hinted no reproach about this little detail having been withheld from him.

The detective seemed to understand that Frank's candour would end here. "These torn fragments confirm our theory," he said cheerfully. "It is, that if you had not paid your visit, you would have received a letter in this directed envelope. The servant girl says that before you came this morning, Madame had been sitting in her bed-room, writing, for a long time. The girl had gone in and out, hoping to disturb her, as she wanted to be about her usual domestic duties there. But Madame took no notice, and the girl thought what a long letter it must be. When she announced your coming, Madame was still at the desk, and she then crumpled up a lot of paper and thrust it into her pocket. While you were there, the girl took the opportunity of sweeping out the room and found these pieces on the floor; as if, in Madame's hurry, they had just missed her pocket-hole. Seeing they were only torn scraps, she swept them into the dust-pan, which, fortunately, had not been emptied into the dust-bin when our man put in his appearance."

"Then you think she was writing a letter to my nephew," observed Mr. Connell.

"Probably she was, sir," replied the detective, with the deferential manner he always used towards the minister. "We believe it would have contained whatever she has told him, and given instructions about this packet; and possibly some other feat of jugglery would have been performed over the ring. I confess that the large sum of money in the packet puzzles me more than any amount of mystery. From the little evidence we can as yet gather, she seems to have been, in a general way, but an ordinary swindling fortune-teller. In fact it is this shabby conclusion about her, and our suspicion that she must have come unlawfully into possession of the ring, which enables us to take up the inquiry at all. You, Mr. Raven, may know of better grounds, but we cannot act upon them officially until they become

public grounds; that is, public to us. Many matters, grievously inconvenient and distressing, occur in private life of which we can take no cognizance whatever."

"Frank," said the minister, "did you tell Mr. Jones of the night-alarm we had in my house?"

"I did not see any necessity for doing that, sir. It was not my affair, either," he added, with a glance at Philip.

"It was nothing—nothing at all," said Philip. "A shadow and a fancy."

"Then there can be no harm in speaking of it," pursued his father, turning to the deeply interested officer. "This packet must have come into my house by some means, Mr. Jones; there can be no doubt of that. And only two nights ago we were certainly threatened with some nocturnal molestation." And Mr. Connell told the story down to the smallest detail of circumstance.

"I am glad you have told me this, sir," spoke the detective, who had been busy with his note-book. "I suppose there is no person in your own house of whom you can have any suspicion? The servants are honest and trustworthy?"

"Quite so. One has been with us twenty years. The other is a simple, respectable young girl."

"H'm," said the detective, still writing. "Well, we will do our best."

"If this portmanteau was taken away yesterday," Frank cried, speaking out without any preface, after the manner of those greatly wrapt in their own reflections, "that only shifts the question a little back. If she could not have carried it away herself to-day, she could not have carried it yesterday."

"Ah, we are making inquiries as to that, too," answered Mr. Jones. "But these things take a little time. You may rely, gentlemen, on our leaving no point unnoticed—or unexamined." And so, after a little more discussion, the interview ended.

Frank's thoughts were busy. If that good man, his uncle, was to help and advise, ought he not to know all? Little as Mr. Connell had said, Frank somehow had learned to put faith in him.

"Uncle," he said, in a low voice, as the three went together into the library, before joining the evening circle, "when I was talking with the detective just now, I felt sorry that I had not told you about the paper which was enclosed with the gold."

Mr. Connell turned towards him with a faint flush on his wan cheeks. He was keenly sensitive, as introspective scholars often are. "Never mind, my boy," he said, kindly. "I remember that youth often has strange and unaccountable silences."

Frank went on in so low a voice, that Philip could not catch his words. "When that woman told me what you know, she added some advice. The paper I got this evening bore on that."

He handed it to Mr. Connell. The lamp was burning very low,

and the minister's spectacles were not at hand. He drew the dim light towards him and held the paper behind it.

Its texture was thin and coarse. Philip, at the other side of the table, looked up, and saw through it the scrawling caligraphy. There were seven words. Of course, he saw them backwards and so could not read them, except the last two: he was sure he was not mistaken in them.

The minister gave a kind of groan, and returned the paper to Frank. "You don't know the writing?" he said. "It looks somehow familiar to me."

"It is like my father's," whispered Frank. "Like his; yet different—a kind of copy."

"Well, well," said Mr. Connell. "Of course, you set no value on this?"

"Certainly not," answered Frank, with that tone of contempt which is far less easily assumed than one of indignation.

"That's right," observed the minister. "But we must not forget that she—the subject of this message—may be as innocent and unconscious as any of us. No breath of this thing should be allowed to reach her."

Frank suddenly stood so stock-still that his uncle turned and gazed at him. A sudden memory called out by Mr. Connell's words, had darted through the clouds of bewilderment within him, and had lit up a long chain of circumstances with new significance.

(To be continued.)

THE PERPLEXITIES OF CAPTAIN FIERAMOSCA.

By Joyce Darrell.

I.

DOUBTLESS you, reader, like everybody else in these travelling days, have been to Venice. You have seen the great sights, properly admired the sunsets from the Lido, dreamed away delicious hours in a gondola, fed the pigeons and waited for the bronze Moors to strike the hours.

And, inspired by the later prophets, you have explored the narrow calli in search of Byzantine fragments. You have dawdled on the little bridges, or by the steps where the fruit-barges unload, and you have watched the myriad sparkles of the lovely green water caressingly creep up the mournful walls of the houses.

All this you have done, and more; but perhaps you have never just chanced to stray into the Campiello Nuovo. When it came by its name it were hard to say, for there is nothing new about it. Once, as an inscription on the wall records, it was a cemetery, and ceased to be one at a comparatively recent date. Something of the mild and melancholy grace of its former office clings to it still, and, for all its woeful shabbiness, renders it instinct with a pathetic and picturesque charm.

On one side (the most prosperous and least attractive) rises a white house with red brick mouldings, behind which the acacias of a pleasant garden are just visible above the high stone wall. Opposite is a jumble of irregular buildings, whose mildewed walls and gaping crevices the weeds soften here and there with feathery tufts of green. Most of the shutters are closed; those which are open hang often but by one rusty hinge.

From one house projects a little wooden terrace partly overhung with creepers and crowded with flower pots, and supported on small twisted marble columns. All about, up and down, with no order in their placing, are tiny windows opening obviously into lowly rooms. In front of another line of dwellings runs a low wall, and in the midst of this is a small, mysterious-looking green door which might be the entrance to the house of Bluebeard.

A water-carrier with her bronze pails slung from her shoulder rings at this: the little door opens noiselessly, pulled back by unseen hands; a glimpse is given of a narrow paved court set about with flower-pots, and then the water-carrier (bearer perhaps of a secret note to Fatima) disappears with a splash and a jingle, and a greeting in her soft Venetian to some hidden friend within.

Into all this dreaminess and decay Captain Fieramosca flashed like a meteor. He suddenly appeared on the grass-grown pavement one sunny morning, and between his golden epaulettes and his raven moustaches, startled the "humans" almost as much as he did the pigeons. With the difference, however, that to the former he was a very welcome sight, for Venice was still in all the fever of her liberation. For the smallest festa the tricolour was slung across every calle; the canals still echoed to the sound of the Garibaldian Hymn; the children everywhere still shouted for glee as the bersaglieri with their drooping plumes and rapid steps strode by them.

Consequently, when it appeared that the young officer was in search of somebody, a dozen people came forward to help him. "Was it the Siora Elena? No, it was the Siora Maria! Ecco! here on the left."

And on his finally passing under the green door (which turned out to have nothing to do with Bluebeard after all), quite an excited little group of friendly intruders followed him and gave him contradictory directions from mere excess of zeal.

The persons whom Captain Fieramosca sought, it appeared, were three sisters, two old maids and a widow, who lived together on the third floor of a house. As he reached the landing indicated to him, and before he had time to utter a word, the little brown maid who stood at the open door, after gaping at him wildly for one brief moment, suddenly darted back screaming, "Siora Maria! Siora Maria!"

And straight upon her cry down a narrow passage rushed a stout, untidy woman, sobbing rather than crying, "Mi fio, mi fio!" and precipitating herself into the astonished officer's arms, bestowed upon him an embrace as loving as it was snuffy and altogether unsavoury.

Captain Fieramosca staggered back, as well he might, the lady did the same, and there ensued a rapid interchange of explanations from which it appeared that our hero had been mistaken for the widow's son.

"It was the maid's mistake in the first instance, and then the dark passage and the uniform. But for her part she was not sorry to have kissed even *that*. Doubtless the Signor Capitano understood her feelings?" said the still palpitating mother.

He understood them quite well, and being the softest-hearted of warriors forgave them, and the memory of the snuff becoming fainter, presently even sympathised with them. And by the time that he had entered the little dwelling-room and been introduced to two more slatternly and smiling women, had sat down and produced the package which he had brought from Signora Maria's son, he was on as friendly terms with the trio as though he had known them for years.

Nevertheless, an inquisitive person might have wondered why,

when the first outburst of conversation languished, Captain Fieramosca should not have taken his leave. And a very observant person, noticing how often his eyes wandered towards a particular door, might have found in that fact the explanation of his staying.

For at that door, on the young officer's entrance he had caught a brief vision of a pale little face with huge black eyes, and a cloud of golden hair. An untidy little head, but a very pretty one as Fieramosca had not been slow to discover. And interpreting sundry movements behind the door to the effort to present a favourable appearance generally, he sat twirling his beloved moustache and growing every moment more monosyllabic and more determined not to move.

And presently his patience was rewarded. For a black veil on its head, a prayer book in its hand and its eyes demurely cast down, in tripped the vision. Captain Fieramosca sprang to his feet, staring with all his might of admiration and rapture.

"My daughter, Clelia," said the widow, adding in a quick, sub-acid undertone. "Why, may I ask, have you dressed yourself up like that?"

"Why? Don't we always go to mass?" inquired Clelia, with an air of the most innocent surprise.

"To-day we are too late, child. And you know it"—the last words again in sotto voce.

The "child" probably had known it. But to that she was not going to confess. And at any rate her object in so attiring herself was accomplished, for Captain Fieramosca was already fathoms deep in love. Since the days of Romeo in neighbouring Verona, no passion had probably ever been born so quickly at first sight. But the truth was our officer had heard of Clelia already. Her portrait had been shown him by her brother, his bosom friend Enrico, and something regarding her had been related to him, which had stirred his chivalrous instincts.

If Fieramosca grew visibly more lively after Clelia came in, Clelia's mother lapsed into a silence which even bordered on sulks. And Clelia herself, though she looked bewitching, perhaps felt the chill of her parent's manner, for she also was mute. At least, her tongue was, but her eyes were very eloquent as the visitor suddenly launched into patriotic descriptions of the recent campaign.

It was rather uphill work for Captain Fieramosca, this one-sided conversation with two old maids who had not very much to answer beyond "Good gracious!" and "Think of that!"

On his rising at last to go, Aunt Teresa—the youngest, but also the meekest and most depressed of the sisters—Aunt Teresa, who never did anything as a rule but say a few prayers and take care of her health; absolutely ventured on the initiative, and asked him if "he would not come again?"

"With the utmost pleasure," said the young man, eagerly. "And

perhaps I shall sometimes meet the ladies out of doors? On the Piazza, for instance, of an evening?"

"We hardly ever go," answered Signora Maria, stiffly.

"Only on a Sunday, and then *always*," added Clelia, promptly.

Fieramosca had the tact not to seem to hear this welcome news. But he bowed very low over the speaker's little hand, outstretched in farewell. And the maid appearing at this moment with a message that very conveniently drew off the Signora Maria's attention, he found time to utter below his breath, "Enrico bids you have trust in him, and write to him through *me*."

"You had better go and take off that finery," said the Signora Maria to her daughter, when the last clanking of Fieramosca's sword had died away upon the stairs. "And I should like to know what makes you the colour of a slice of pumpkin?"

"It is the first heat," gurgled the fat, good-natured Teresa, who had noticed the officer's aside, although she had not heard it, and who was almost as frightened as Clelia herself, lest the mother should have observed it too.

In these days of cheap posts and convenient letter-boxes, it may seem strange that Clelia's brother should have requested her to write to him through his friend. But our poor little heroine was an Italian girl of the middle class. In other words, the free-and-easy ways of our English damsels were just as unknown to her as dancing on the tight-rope. She slept with her mother, got up with her, went out with her, went to bed with her, and had not a penny to call her own in the world.

Before she could have written a letter, she must have escaped from her mother's eyes, and from those of the hardly less watchful Aunt Giustina. And before she could have posted it, she must have intrigued to obtain money for the stamp. As for the answer, there would have been no means of her obtaining that in secret at all. And yet she had sore need to write to her brother, for, except Aunt Teresa, who was too flabby to count for much, he was the only creature on whom she could depend for sympathy and help.

The Signora Maria loved her son with a passion which almost excluded her daughter from her heart. But, determined to do her best for the girl materially, and with no light of real tenderness in which to see the best clearly, she had made up her mind that Clelia should marry a certain well-to-do lawyer, forty years her senior. And Giustina, who, like her elder sister, loved money with a passion born of narrow-mindedness and sordid, life-long poverty, encouraged the project warmly.

Enrico himself, fine fellow though he was, would hardly of his own accord have opposed his mother or meddled with so exclusively a parental question as the disposal of a mere girl's future, had not Clelia, when he was last at home, fairly vanquished him by her tears and entreaties.

"Whom am I to marry her to, if not to Signor Biagio?" angrily inquired his mother, one day, when he ventured to protest.

Enrico pulled his moustaches in perplexity. Clearly Clelia must be married to somebody. She was too pretty to be allowed to drift into a yellow and morose spinsterhood like Aunt Giustina's, or an adipose and tearful one, like Aunt Teresa's.

"She has not any dower worth the mentioning, and who will marry her without?" further snapped the Signora Maria.

"Some disinterested young fellow," murmured poor Enrico, vaguely.

"Find him," was the cynical and curt reply.

A brilliant image, compounded of a dashing uniform, sparkling eyes, white teeth, and general impetuosity, leapt into Enrico's mind.

"There is Fieramosca," he said, lowering his voice cautiously, lest Clelia should overhear.

"A jackanapes, with more gold on his coat than in his purse, I suppose?" retorted Signora Maria, contemptuously.

"In that case, a jackanapes much resembling myself," replied the injured lieutenant.

"There is a difference," muttered his mother. "But it is no use talking, Enrico. No girl in her senses would dream of refusing Signor Biagio. He is rich and well thought of; and though, of course, he is not young, that makes him all the steadier, and, instead of breaking Clelia's heart in a year or two by running after other women, he will take good care of her, and stay at home *always*."

"Poor Clelia!" thought the young man; and the next day, before marching, whispered a few words of comfort and hope into his weeping sister's ear.

II.

Fieramosca intended to wait three days before paying a fresh visit to the house behind the green door. As a point of fact he waited two: then called with the excuse that he was writing to Enrico. "Had the Signora any message?"

The Signora was much obliged, but she had no message, having written recently herself. And she sat bolt upright on the edge of her chair, and consistently repelled the various little feelers in the way of friendly converse which the unfortunate warrior threw out.

He inquired for the Signorina. She was not very well, he was told; and in truth her door was inexorably shut.

"I will—ah!—send to inquire for her to-morrow," stammered Fieramosca. (He was going to say "call," but the Gorgon must have looked habitually more engaging than did the Signora Maria at this moment.)

"We are going into the country, for some days, to-morrow," replied the lady. Her visitor felt convinced that this was an audacious fib.

Four people, with an income which in England would render starvation a mere question of time, were not likely to make many excursions to the mainland.

Fieramosca rose to take his leave with a dignity which betrayed his wounded feelings. A quiver of regret passed over the sour countenance of Enrico's mother as she responded to the farewell. But she would not unbend. The officer's eyes had said too much on his first visit, and Clelia had been too rebellious ever since, actually going to the length of huffing Signor Biagio.

Poor Fieramosca went downstairs feeling very crestfallen. As the green door closed behind him, he looked up at the third-floor windows regretfully. One of them opened, and Clelia's golden head appeared. Without seeming to notice the woe-begone lover, whose attitude had already let half the neighbourhood into his secret, she called to a flock of pigeons that were brooding away the sunny hours on the parapet of a neighbouring house.

They flew greedily, one, the tamest, perching on her shoulder. She took it, caressed it, then throwing a handful of grain so that it fell just at the young man's feet, let the pigeon fly in search of it. The whole flock followed, and Clelia closed the window.

But as the pigeons hustled and fought in front of him, Fieramosca noticed a white something protruding from beneath the tame one's wing. To catch the little glutton was at that moment the easiest of tasks, and the next instant saw him in exultant possession of the note which it had unwittingly brought.

Just so much prudence he still had as to resolve to wait before reading it until he was round the corner. Feeling very heroic upon the strength of this determination, he was presently much disconcerted to discover that all his proceedings had been observed. A lady seated upon a balcony overlooking the acacias was watching him with smiling eyes. She was young and rather pretty. Had Fieramosca not been in love he might have thought her *very* pretty. As it was, he mentally consigned her to Jericho and marched off, the colour of a poppy.

Tearing open the note two minutes later, he found a hurried, blurred, pathetic scrawl, telling him that Clelia was now on the brink of despair. Her mother watched her more vigilantly than ever, and hardly spoke but to scold her. Aunt Giustina preached to her from morning to night, and, to crown all, Signor Biagio declared that he would wait no longer. Unless Enrico interfered, another week would see the contract signed, and she had no alternative but suicide.

Let the sympathetic reader conceive the condition to which this news reduced Fieramosca. He telegraphed to Enrico and wrote; then alternated between rage and the blackest melancholy, as every moment made him realize more and more how helpless he himself was to save the woman he loved. With the common-sense charac-

teristic of his condition, he spent all his leisure in haunting the neighbourhood of the house to which access was inexorably denied him. But that brought him but scanty consolation, for Clelia spent her days in weeping upon her bed, and had ceased even to feed her pigeons.

The lovers' cup of bitterness overflowed finally when Enrico, who had written earnestly to his mother, promising to come within a few days, and imploring that no decisive step might be taken without him, telegraphed that his regiment had received urgent marching orders for the brigand country. Then, indeed, was poor little Clelia's last state worse than her first, for the Signora Maria declaring that her son would be killed, was not only drowned in tears herself, but emptied the vials of her wrath and desolation upon the heads of everybody surrounding her.

"Fate was doing its worst for her, but she would not be balked in everything, on that she was resolved," she said. And rising with the sun, to nurse her sorrow resentfully till midnight, she stitched and scoured with a haste born of rage, and hurried on the preparations for the wedding appallingly.

"Oh, no! I can do nothing for you! Nothing! Nothing!" piteously sobbed poor Teresa, whom Fieramosca waylaid on her road from early mass. "My sister is demented, I think, and we are all but wax in her hands!"

The fluttered, fat, old creature evidently terrified out of her wits lest she should be seen speaking to the unhappy lover, was as incapable of help as of counsel. "If Clelia would only consent quietly to the marriage!" she maundered on, idiotically, at the very moment of Fieramosca's protest that he should never survive that event. It was like a stage duet in which two people in the same key of dismay sing totally contradictory words.

"At least, tell her I know this is her birthday, give her these flowers, and say that I shall never forget her until I die," cried Fieramosca imploringly, too miserable to be angry.

"Yes, yes!" said Teresa, clutching convulsively at the blossoms. "I will say anything in the world you like, only do pray let her be married in peace." And with this characteristic speech she escaped.

Such dubious comfort as he may have derived from this interview evaporating very quickly, Fieramosca found himself on the evening of the very same day, once more in the front of the pitiless green door. It was bright moonlight, and such flowers as Venice possesses had lavished all their fragrance on the balmy air. Poor Fieramosca, strung almost to madness by the combined spell of his sorrow and the hour, paced restlessly up and down.

And a shabby old priest, who had been on his way from the neighbouring church of Santo Stefano to play an innocent game of cards with the Signora Maria and her sisters, drew back into the shadow as he espied the officer, and stealthily took note of his proceedings.

For a short time watcher and watched were the only creatures stirring in the lonely little space. From the grand canal, very full to-night of gondolas, floated the faint sound of successive serenades. All at once, like a single message detached from the volume of melody, the light twinkle of a guitar was heard to draw nearer and nearer. The musicians—three altogether—appeared, mounted the steps of the Campiello, and planted themselves under Clelia's window. Conceive the jealous rage of Fieramosca, who knew they must have been sent by Signor Biagio! Conceive the excitement of the inquisitive old priest, who thought they had been hired by Fieramosca!

A light tenor lifted up his voice and warbled Venetian love ditties—unique songs, which combine the tenderness of Lindoro with the malice of Harlequin. It was like a scene out of a comedy by Goldoni.

But Captain Fieramosca was in no mood to institute literary comparisons, and execrated performance and performers with the energy of a trooper. He only recovered a portion of calm on perceiving that the sole effect of the aspirant bridegroom's homage was to elicit the respectable but unlovely head of the Signora Maria.

"You have been sent by Signor Biagio?" she shrilly and prosaically inquired on appearing at the window.

"Oh, Signora, that is a secret," was the laughing answer.

"Secret? Fiddlesticks! I wish to know?"

"And we may not tell."

"Then you may just take yourselves off for a pack of screaling fools," was the candid retort, and the window closed with a bang upon the wrath of Clelia's mother.

"I suppose that Jew will think he has had his money's worth out of us by now," presently remarked the singer to his companions. "We might go back to him."

"*Andemo!* Let us go." And they departed, closely followed by Fieramosca, who in his turn was tracked by the priest.

Love, unreasonable in itself as we know, is rendered more so by its "familiar"—the green-eyed monster. It may seem inconceivable, and yet it is true, that the musicians' refusal to give the name of their employer had rendered our son of Mars uneasy. Perhaps Clelia might have other admirers, he thought with a pang. At any rate, he wished to be sure. And the old priest, in his zeal for his friend the good Signora Maria, wished to be sure also; and was, moreover, as sapiently convinced as ever that the instigator of the music was the officer.

A short walk brought the serenaders to the marble steps, where a gondola was waiting. Captain Fieramosca leaning casually over a parapet appeared to be admiring the moonlit ripple of the water. The priest, afraid of being seen, had to take up his position where he could hardly hear anything.

A brisk haggling instantly began between the musicians and a sharp-visaged, hawk-eyed old gentleman with a voice like a corn-crake—as obviously Signor Biagio as though his name had been written on his forehead. Fieramosca was gratified to see how ugly he was, and to hear how avaricious. Only with the gratification mingled fresh disgust at the thought that Clelia should ever be expected to marry such a man.

Signor Biagio swore that he had engaged the musicians for three songs (selected by himself) and that they had only had time to sing two. They vowed that he must have been asleep, and consequently oblivious of the flight of time. Venetian wit is keen and Venetian tongues are rapid, so that there is no saying how long the battle might have lasted, had not another gondola glided up alongside of the old lawyer's, and its occupant, a lady, courteously requested to be allowed to disembark.

She was young, and Fieramosca, somewhat lighter of heart now, remarked that she was pretty, and a foreigner unmistakably. She caught her foot in her dress as she was ascending the steps, and stumbled. He darted forward to assist her, but she recovered herself, and thanked him sweetly. As he bowed and drew back to let her pass, she hesitated and said a few words in English to her companion, apparently a maid. Looking at her more closely now, in the bright light, her face struck Fieramosca as not entirely unknown.

To his surprise, she turned and addressed him by name. "You are in the regiment of which my brother-in-law is colonel," she said. "I have heard of you. Perhaps you have heard of me. My name is Mrs. Walford."

He had, in truth, heard of her, as an eccentric, rich, and beautiful young widow. The adventure would have been delightful, had his heart not been given to Clelia.

"I should like to say something to you," she continued, in a tone of frank and friendly kindness. "Would you mind walking a few steps down the street with me. I know," she added, with an arch smile, "you do not shun this neighbourhood."

Astonished, interested, and rather amused, he protested his willingness to accompany her.

"I only wished to get you out of earshot of that old lawyer," said Mrs. Walford. "I fancy he will stay bargaining there till dawn. No doubt you think my addressing you in this way rather strange. . . Never mind protesting. . . . I shall soon explain myself. . . . I have seen you before, twice. Once, for a moment, at a ball at ——, when my brother-in-law was quartered there; and the second time, the other day, in the Campiello Nuovo." He remembered now. She was the lady who had been sitting on the balcony.

"I know quite well why you are always hanging about there," she continued, laughingly. "I have one or two acquaintances who know

the pretty Clelia and her mother, and that *dreadful* old Biagio. I should so much like to help you if you would only allow me."

Allow her! at first Fieramosca was speechless with delight. But he speedily refound his tongue and poured forth his gratitude. And as Mrs. Walford revelled in kind acts and took an amiable pleasure in being thanked for them, she grew every moment more cordial, sympathetic and delightful.

"My brother-in-law is just now at —— with my sister, who has not been well, you know," she said. "Otherwise I should have had you introduced to me some days ago. I was only waiting for his return, and now chance has supplied his place. The fact seems to me of good omen. You will call to-morrow morning and talk your troubles over. No thanks, at least yet. Good night!"

And with a warm hand-clasp, which the old priest duly witnessed, they parted.

III.

THE next morning needless to say, saw Fieramosca in Mrs. Walford's drawing-room. She received him with the charming kindness which seemed habitual to her, and told him that she had spent a part of the night in musing over the means of helping him.

"I have thought of an excuse for introducing myself to the Signora Maria," she said, "and I think that with a little patience I might induce her to let me have Clelia here sometimes. Thus you would see one another, and she would be inspired with fresh courage for resisting. It all sounds rather Jesuitical, I am afraid," added the young widow, laughing, "but we are told that everything is fair in love; and it would be too bad if the poor child were bullied into marrying that indescribable old man after all."

Poor Fieramosca groaned. "The plan would be perfect, *cara Signora*. But alas! time presses. The marriage is fixed for next week."

Mrs. Walford clasped her white hands in despair. She had no idea that matters had gone so far. "And is there *nobody* to prevent such infamy?"

"Nobody, now that Enrico is away."

"And will he not come?" asked Mrs. Walford, apparently not needing to ask who Enrico might be.

Fieramosca explained the state of the case.

"The brigand country!" echoed his hearer, with a strange catch of her breath. "Is—is that not a service of great danger just now?"

"Well—it is what a soldier wants," answered the officer, rather wondering at the question. She made no immediate reply, and he added gloomily, "I wish I, too, were in the brigand country."

"You and Signor Enrico Renier though in the same branch of the service are in different corps. How is it you are such dear friends?" inquired Mrs. Walford.

He looked at her, again somewhat surprised. "Did I tell you we were such friends?"

"I thought—I have heard—I mean, I fancied you said so," she answered, blushing doubtless with embarrassment at her little mistake.

"You only fancied what is true then," replied Fieramosca, cordially. "We were like brothers at the military college in Piedmont, where Enrico was sent because he wished to be a soldier and would not serve the Austrians. He is a fine fellow, and has a brilliant career before him, I believe."

"But is he not very poor?" asked the lady, with an inflexion of pity—or was it another feeling?

"Yes," Fieramosca admitted, "that was so, unfortunately. Most Italian officers were poor." He, himself, though the reverse of rich, had a small something beyond his pay. But he was an exception, and he often felt sorry for his comrades. And Enrico's father was a patriot who had sacrificed everything to his country.

Mrs. Walford exclaimed in admiration and compassion, even changing colour as she said, "I am so interested in—in these patriots. Please tell me more."

Our hero, to do him justice, was generally ready enough to talk about his friend. But just now his one object was to talk about his friend's sister. Nevertheless, he lent himself to what he regarded as the young widow's generous caprice, and launched into an epitome of the history of '48, with Enrico's father as the principal personage.

Mrs. Walford listened with a singular attention, presently however lapsing into reverie. By way of recalling her to the subject of his own woes, her visitor wound up his story with considerable tact, by saying, "Can you wonder that I should desire to marry the daughter of such a man?"

"The daughter?" said the lady, with a start. "The sister you mean?"

Fieramosca stared. "I was talking of Enrico's father," he said.

"Oh dear! I beg your pardon. I was thinking—that is——"

Whom Mrs. Walford had been thinking of did not transpire. Probably, on reflection, she would not have told. But, in any case, she did not have the chance; for at this moment, the door opened, and in trotted the little priest of St°. Stefano. Fieramosca did not know him; but he knew Fieramosca, and his eyes twinkled considerably on discovering him there. He had come to talk to Mrs. Walford of her charities, and the officer consequently rose to take his leave.

"I must see you again to-morrow," said the widow, in low, urgent tones. "And don't lose courage. We shall think of something. Difficulties only inspire me."

The next afternoon the Signora Maria remarked casually to her daughter: "I always thought that empty-headed friend of Enrico's was not haunting this neighbourhood for nothing."

Clelia turned a very lively colour. Had Aunt Teresa told about the birthday gift of flowers? she thought.

An agonizing moment elapsed while the Signora Maria was apparently absorbed in examination of her work. She stuck a pin or two between her lips, then resumed: "He is going to be married to the rich widow opposite."

"It is not true!" cried Clelia, passionately, the swift denial wrung from her by astonishment and pain.

The Signora Maria was wont to snub any such flat contradiction of her words; but in this instance she only said carelessly, "Don't you believe it? Why?"

Why, indeed? Clelia, with a whirling brain and a beating heart, sat mute.

"I think it must be true," continued her mother, "because it was told me by Don Giacomo, and he, you know, is always at this Englishwoman's. Fieramosca is there for hours every day, and quite alone. And the other evening—let me see, when was it?—to be sure—the night of your birthday—he met her, by appointment evidently, as she got out of her gondola at the *traghetto* yonder, and went home with her."

Signora Maria had taken the pins from her mouth now, and was fastening them into her work; and just so deliberately and placidly did she plant each dagger-thrust of news into her quivering daughter's heart. Clelia neither fainted nor cried aloud; but, as the ruins of her happiness fell about her, she had a vague feeling of wonderment that everybody should continue so calm.

There was a ring at the door, and the little maid, going to open, came back presently rather flustered, and announced "a lady."

"I trust I do not intrude," said Mrs. Walford, smilingly, with a courteous bow to every one, and a special kindly smile to Clelia. The girl had risen, and stood like a statue. She knew quite well who the stranger was.

Signora Maria, by no means in a trim to receive visitors, felt secretly put out, but her Italian ease of manner carried her through the difficult situation successfully. Instead of the repellant English formula, "To what am I indebted?" she simply told Mrs. Walford that she was very glad to see her, exactly as if she had known her all her life.

"I called," said the widow, "because I have heard that you are the fortunate possessor of some old lace, with which, if you found an appreciative purchaser, you would be willing to part. My informant is Don Giacomo. Is he right?"

"Yes," said the Signora, "so far right that some time ago she thought of disposing of the lace. But now she had promised it to her daughter, who was going to be married."

"Indeed!" Mrs. Walford turned towards Clelia: "Was the Signorina to be married soon?"

Instead of answering this question, the young girl, white to the lips, trembling, but resolutely composed, put another: "Did the lady know Captain Fieramosca?"

("Madonna mia! What is the little lunatic going to ask now?" was her mother's secret ejaculation.)

Mrs. Walford positively blushed. Blushed with the secret guilt of her mission and with the excitement of Clelia's interrogation.

"Yes," she answered. "She knew Captain Fieramosca *very well*. Had—had the Signorina any message for him?"

The blush, and the emphasis of her speech were fatal. Clelia was sure now, that Don Giacomo had spoken the truth.

"You can tell him," said Clelia, "that I am going to be married immediately, and with *my own full consent*. And when he writes to my brother, I wish him to say this." And rapidly, with a steady step and a face like marble, she passed from the room.

Mrs. Walford sat in speechless amazement. "What did it all mean?" she asked herself. "Were the words she had just heard to be interpreted literally, or did they contain some hidden warning to be conveyed by Fieramosca to Enrico?" She was so busy revolving this question, that she hardly listened to Signora Maria's perturbed and murmured explanations that "Girls were so strange;" "Clelia was excited;" "Her marriage promised to be an excellent one," &c. &c. And failing of any satisfactory solution, she rose, at last, to go, without having accomplished one fifth part of all that she had intended.

Signora Maria extracted a rod from its pickle for her daughter, on the very first occasion: but, to her amazement, Clelia was as docile as a lamb. "She did not know what her mother wanted," she said. "She was ready to marry Signor Biagio as soon as anybody wished. What more was expected of her?"

And in this attitude of stony calm she remained, while her bridegroom was informed of his happiness, and all the preparations for the wedding were hurried on.

Signora Maria could hardly believe in her own luck, but she was jubilant. And what presently crowned her happiness, was a letter from Enrico, announcing that his regiment, when already en route, had received counter-orders, and turned back. Consequently, he had been able to obtain four days' leave, and would follow almost immediately on his letter.

"Then if he arrives to-morrow, the contract can be signed the day after, and the marriage can be on the next day to that," said the mother.

"Just as you like," replied Clelia, listlessly.

When Enrico made his appearance his kind face fell considerably on hearing that he was just in time for the wedding.

"Why, Clelia, what is this? Are you really going to marry that old —— ahem!—Biagio after all?"

"Apparently I am," said the girl.

Her brother laid his hand caressingly on her shoulder. "But do you thoroughly wish it, little one? Speak frankly to me before it is too late."

Her eyes filled at the kind touch, the affectionate words. But in her present mood martyrdom was a relief, and she took a sort of savage pleasure in deliberately increasing her own torture. Turning her head away she repeated, "I tell you I am going to marry him. Why cannot you be satisfied with that?"

"One would think I was forcing the child, to hear you, and look at you, Enrico," said his mother, resentfully. Then, by way of distracting his attention from his sister, and rivetting Clelia's determination, she added: "Your Fieramosca is going to marry a rich Englishwoman who, by-the-bye, lives over there"—pointing to the house with the acacias.

"The beggar! To think of his never telling me!" exclaimed Enrico, with an incredulous laugh. "Who is she? How is she called?"

"*Valfora? Valvona?* Do you suppose I can pronounce it?" replied Signora Maria. "Can you, Teresa?"

Teresa was equally incapable. But said, "Enrico ought to know. For, according to Don Giacomo, it must be an old affair, as the lady was sister-in-law to Fieramosca's colonel."

"What!" shouted Enrico, and bounced to his feet with an energy that shook the room.

"The saints have mercy on us! Are you gone out of your mind?" exclaimed his mother.

"What was it you said, Teresa? Say it again. Tell me, everything. Quick!" continued the young man, still unaccountably agitated.

Teresa did his bidding as well as her scattered wits would allow her; then continued inquisitively, "But what difference can it make to you?"

"Difference?" echoed Enrico. "None at all. I am very glad, of course I am. Only surprised, you know, *surprised.*" And he began striding up and down the narrow room in a state which if it indeed expressed mere surprise, was certainly a manifestation of primordial energy.

Clelia could stand it no longer. All these questions, this excitement fell upon the gaping wounds of her grief like drops of vitriol. Unnoticed, or at least unchallenged by her brother, she rose and crept away, yearning for the rare luxuries of solitude and silence.

As soon as she was gone, Teresa, with that vague delight in adding fuel to a flame but vaguely understood, so dear to narrow minds, observed, "I think Fieramosca cannot be a very well-principled young man?"

"Why not?" asked Enrico, tugging at his moustache, and staring absently into space.

"He is going to be married himself, and he knows Clelia is——"

"How does he know it?" interrupted the Signora Maria, suspiciously.

"Of course, Enrico would mention it to him," replied Teresa, adroitly; then resumed: "As I was saying, things are in this position, and yet he can try to carry on a clandestine flirtation with Clelia."

"What do you mean?" blazed out Enrico.

Upon which Teresa, with some embellishment, related the birthday gift of flowers, and the impassioned message which had accompanied it.

"He dared to insult us in this way!" cried the lieutenant; and before his mother, alarmed at his violence, could put in a word, he had clattered down stairs like a train of artillery.

Once in the street, however, he began to reflect. Perhaps, after all, old Don Giacomo's news was a mistake. Fieramosca had always written to him as though he loved Clelia, and Clelia alone. It was, in fact, these letters of his friend's which had brought Enrico to Venice. On the other hand, the old priest was not likely to have invented all his facts; and, supposing any of them to be true, what but love could take Fieramosca to Mrs. Walford's? The notion that anybody could be in that lady's company for five minutes without adoring her, apparently never entered the unhappy muser's mind. Revolving these questions with the wearisome iteration of one absorbing feeling, he paced up and down in front of the widow's windows, wishing that he might go up to her, and yet, for reasons of his own, not daring.

All at once, who among the sons of men should issue from the house but—Fieramosca? And, to make matters worse, simultaneously with his apparition below, Mrs. Walford stepped out upon the balcony. The Captain looked up at her; she looked down upon the Captain; they exchanged a smile, a wave of the hand; Mrs. Walford said, "This evening, then!" and vanished. Vanished without seeing the other watcher, whose heart was in his mouth, and whose livid face and flaming eyes confronted the startled Fieramosca on his turning.

"Enrico!" cried the latter; and, Italian fashion, would have embraced his friend. But Enrico stood like the image of the Commendatore, and further increased his resemblance to that personage by nodding portentously. "It is myself," he said, with the solemnity of concentrated rage.

"Heavens above!" exclaimed Fieramosca. "What has happened? Why do you look like that? Is—is your sister ill?"

"I will thank you not to mention her," replied the other. "And, since you seem desirous of further information, I have the pleasure to tell you that I consider you a blackguard. Moreover, I shall be happy to afford you satisfaction for my candour, not later than three

days from now, when a family event, which demands my presence, shall have taken place."

And, with the ceremonious salute of a subordinate to his superior officer, Enrico turned on his heel and marched away, leaving Fieramosca overwhelmed with distress, choking with rage, and dumbfoundered with amazement.

IV.

THE next evening the Signora Maria gave a little dinner before the signing of the contract to Signor Biagio and the witnesses to that document. It was not a very lively meal, although the bridegroom elect was in the highest spirits. Clelia was as pale as a ghost, and as silent; Enrico profoundly gloomy; the Signora Maria preoccupied. Even Teresa and Giustina were plunged in a little retrospective melancholy, for the sight of their niece on such an occasion, and in her pretty dress, recalled the unrealized dreams of their own vanished youth.

But Signor Biagio did nothing but chatter, and when the contract was signed and everybody was pouring forth congratulations, he positively went to the length of trying to kiss the pallid little bride on her forehead. To his extreme discomfiture and the embarrassment of everybody, Clelia shrank away from him with a shuddering cry of disgust.

"*Diavolo!*" said Signor Biagio, and looked excessively put out.

"Nerves," smoothly suggested a witness, divided between obsequiousness and compassion.

The Signora Maria glowered at her daughter, but had the tact to be silent. Not so, however, the Signora Giustina. The spectacle of her niece's resistance somehow rendered her snappish, and roughly saying, "Don't be a baby," she pulled Clelia forward as if to force her to submit to the loathed caress. With a passionate movement and a stifled sob, more expressive even than her previous cry, the poor child wrenched herself free, and darting into the next room, locked the door upon her tormentors.

Whither by another entrance the Signora Maria straightway betook herself, and began an appropriate lecture.

"Let me be," moaned Clelia, writhing on her sofa in the friendly darkness. "Leave me to myself for a little, and I will try to do as you desire"

"Come with me, mother!" sternly commanded Enrico from the doorway.

"And Signor Biagio?" exclaimed the perplexed woman, wringing her hands, feeling dreadfully sorry for herself, and, now that her hopes were so near fruition, a little sorry even for her child.

"If you say another word about that old ape, I vow I will drop him from the window into the canal," cried Enrico, angrily, and by main force took his mother away.

Left to herself, and her convulsive sobbing calmed at last, Clelia raised herself and began to think. If she refused after all to marry the old lawyer, what would her life be at home? If she did marry him, what would it be then? As if in answer, his grating accents broke upon her ear and filled her with fresh horror. She could not bear it; she would run away. There was a convent, she remembered, somewhere, where she could take refuge for the night. Signor Biagio would never marry her after such an outbreak, and, if her mother refused to be pacified, she could become a nun.

Rising, she groped for a shawl, found it, and throwing it over her head, slipped noiselessly from the room. Taking the precaution to lock the door and put the key into her pocket, so that she might still, for a time, be supposed to have bolted herself within, she glided downstairs like a spirit, and quickly found herself beneath the silent stars.

The evening was young, but in Venice the streets are at an early hour deserted, and Clelia, hurrying along in the shadow, attracted but slight notice from the few passers-by. At last, a man looked at her somewhat curiously, and, to escape him, she sped up the steps of a little bridge. There, in the welcome gloom of the houses, she paused, for a new terror had just possessed her on remembering that, after all, she did not know the exact way to the Convent. To embark upon the labyrinth of Venice streets was not a light matter, and money for a gondola she had none.

Listlessly she stood, feeling already the reaction from her late excitement, and grateful for the soothing mystery of the still Venetian night.

Beneath her flowed the noiseless water, its surface dark beneath the bridges, barely lighter where the stars shone on it, and broken but at rarest intervals by the reflection of a lamp. A shadowy figure crossed the bridge opposite to her, issuing momentarily from the gloom of the narrow *calle* only again to be spectrally eclipsed. Clelia's eyes filled with tears as she bent her head upon her folded arms, but they were tears of thankfulness for the scanty boons of loneliness and freedom. Suddenly she was roused by the sound of familiar tones. Phantom-like, and unheard by her, an uncovered gondola was gliding beneath the bridge where she stood. Three people were in it, dimly visible, and two of them, a man and a woman, were talking. Clelia peered into the darkness with a beating heart. Exactly at that moment some perverse imp of fate suggested to the gentleman to light a cigar. The tiny flame from his match shone first on the golden epaulettes, and then on the handsome face of—Fieramosca. He threw the light away immediately, but the jealous eyes of the poor little watcher had already, in the lady beside him, detected the elegant grace of Mrs. Walford; and, as if any further confirmation were needed, Clelia distinctly heard that they were speaking of—herself! Perhaps laughing at her, she thought, with the wilful self-torment of love, as she

slowly and mechanically descended the steps, not knowing whither she was going, but just impelled to inconscient action by the intolerable pain within her. All at once she started, on awaking to the fact that she was in the close neighbourhood of her own home. Impelled by the fear of pursuit and discovery, she turned into the cloister of an old Augustinian convent, now disused, or used but as barracks. Here, from a low round archway, three marble steps lead to the water's edge. To these steps, drawn by a blind fascination, Clelia went.

Leaning forward, she glanced up and down the canal: not a gondola was visible. Two or three people passed above her, along the Campo Sant' Angelo. She waited until they were gone, and the sound of their voices and their careless laughter had died away. Yet, for a moment longer she paused, while from the depths of her tortured, aching heart a passionate prayer went up for comprehension and mercy. Then, quivering but resolute, she crept down to the lowest step, clasped her hands over her burning eyes, and cast herself into the silent flood!

"What was that?" excitedly asked an officer, seated alone in a gondola which had just come into sight.

The gondoliers were of opinion that it was a woman who had fallen in.

"She will rise down there, in the flow of the current. For heaven's sake, make haste!" cried the young man, tearing off his coat. And as Clelia's slight figure and streaming hair rose for the first time into sight, he plunged in, and, after a few vigorous strokes, caught her by one convulsive little hand.

How she felt, exactly, she never could tell. But throughout all the pains and pleasures of her after-life, one memory remained in invincible supremacy of vividness, and that was the moment when a lantern flashed into her face, and looking up from her couch at the bottom of a gondola, she met the consternated and passionate eyes of the petrified Fieramosca.

He took her to Mrs. Walford, who, having parted from him at her own door but a quarter of an hour previously, was quite unprepared to see him appear again, in a very damp condition himself, and supporting a dripping damsel upon his arm. "It was," as she afterwards declared, "exactly as though he had paid a casual visit to the water-nixies, and brought one of them away captive." But she received the repentant, the shivering, the miraculously-consoled Clelia, with the most exquisite kindness; put her to bed, whispered something into her ear, and then, with very changing colour herself, sat down to write to Enrico.

Without entering into particulars, or stating Clelia's attempt at suicide, she told him that his sister, resolute not to marry Signor Biagio, was at her house, and would there remain, until some deter-

mination had been come to concerning her. And she politely requested Signor Enrico Renier to call upon her the next morning early, and, if possible, *alone.*

This note reached its destination in the very nick of time. For, Signor Biagio, very cross at Clelia's obstinate absence, had just departed, and the Signora Maria had returned to shake and thunder at the closed doors.

"Of all the wilful, ungrateful, pig-headed ——" she was exclaiming, when Enrico, looking remarkably pale, closed his hand over a letter which had just been brought him, and remarked quietly:

"It is useless to call on Clelia, mother. She has taken refuge from our kindness with Mrs. Walford."

It took his mother a few moments to realize the exact meaning of his words. When they did reach her brain, she plumped down upon the nearest chair, and stared at him speechlessly. Giustina and Teresa also struck attitudes of scandalized dismay. This lasted till they all found their tongues again, when they launched forth into vituperation. Mrs. Walford came in for her share; but then Enrico, rousing himself as if from a dream, said curtly:

"We have nobody to thank but ourselves. The poor child has been driven away by a senseless persecution, and is fortunate in finding a stranger with more sense and more kindness than have fallen to the lot of her family."

Mrs. Walford walking up and down her drawing-room in a state of evident perturbation, the next morning, had not many minutes after the appointed hour to wait, before the door was thrown open, and Enrico ushered in. He advanced with an air of portentous gravity, and bowed ceremoniously. Mrs. Walford's outstretched, trembling little hand fell to her side, and her lips quivered, but she waved him courteously to a chair. He rested his hand on the back of it, but did not sit down.

The young widow unmistakably provoked, communicated Clelia's attempt at self-destruction, with considerably more abruptness than she had intended.

"You cannot see her now, she is asleep," she added, as Enrico, shocked and agitated, started for the door of his sister's room. "As soon as she is sufficiently rested, I will send for you; but you must either come without your mother or bring her in a forgiving mood. I do not know what you call it in Italy, but we in England should not find words sufficiently strong to stigmatize the way in which your unfortunate sister has been treated."

If Mrs. Walford, by this sweeping blame, hoped to sting her visitor into speaking of himself, she was mistaken. Enrico stiffly said that he was quite of her opinion; that he regarded the projected marriage with Signor Biagio as a thing of the past: and that he would do his best to soften and conciliate his mother. There remained, consequently, nothing further for him to do but to thank the

Signora for her great kindness, and to await her permission to see his sister.

"Then, are you going?" exclaimed the lady, in a tone of the most naïve disappointment. "In old days, Signor Renier, your haste was less."

"In old days things were different," was the enigmatical answer, delivered with much stateliness of mien.

"Let us recur for a moment to those days," said the widow, growing paler and paler. "You wished to marry me, and I would not consent simply because, by my husband's will, every penny that I possessed in the world would have gone from me, and marriage in that case must have meant starvation for both of us."

Enrico bowed.

"Consequently we parted. But with a mutual understanding. Do you remember what that was?"

"Certainly," he said, overcoming some emotion with an effort. "We promised lasting constancy, and agreed that if circumstances were ever to alter for either of us, that fact should be communicated by the one to the other."

"Well?" said Mrs. Walford, and began to tremble violently.

Enrico, every moment more like an hidalgo, understood, he said, that circumstances had altered for her.

"Yes," she answered, "I am richer."

He quivered as if each word had been a barb. The news seemed to surprise him, and not agreeably.

"My old uncle has died," Mrs. Walford continued, "and left me a fortune equal to that which I shall lose on marriage."

She caught her breath with a quick sob, and looked at him, smiling out of eyes full of tears.

"And was that why you sent for me to-day?" he asked, uttering the words almost syllable by syllable.

"Partly," she answered, and blushed a lovely rosy red. "But there is something else I should like to add if—if you would only give me the chance."

"Your intention of marrying?" said Enrico stonily.

She made no answer, only turned away her head.

"I congratulate you, madam," said the officer; then resumed, with a sudden break in his voice: "And I hope you will be happy."

Mrs. Walford stared at him in the frankest astonishment. "What in the world do you mean?"

"My meaning is tolerably clear, I think," replied Enrico, bitterly. "You could not be constant to a memory, and I, who am not so fortunate, still love you too well to reproach you."

"Why," she exclaimed breathlessly, "whom do you suppose I want to marry?"

"Whom? Why Fieramosca."

"Fieramosca! His friend, you mean. I—I thought you under-

stood; you—Oh, you *goose!*" she exclaimed. Then a charming frown settled upon her brow, and on the tight-set crimson line of her lips was written the ineradicable resolution not to speak another word.

For the space of a heart-beat Enrico stood silent, quite dizzy with the rush of astonished delight.

"Then forgive me!" he cried, and clasped her in an embrace at once so tender and so masterful as to leave her no choice but to hide her smiling, shame-stricken, lovely face upon his shoulder.

In this interesting attitude they were presently discovered by Fieramosca himself, who, still in a great state about Clelia, burst in like a bombshell. He was much amazed, as may be imagined, and not particularly cordial even when things were explained, for the memory of his last interview with Enrico rankled.

The lieutenant, suddenly recollecting his conduct, made a fervent apology, and Mrs. Walford, catching scent of a duel, gave emphasis to his words by a horrified little shriek.

"It is all very well to say 'forgive,'" replied Fieramosca, still trying very hard for honour's sake to be sulky; "but how did you ever come by such ridiculous ideas, when my letters had told you everything?"

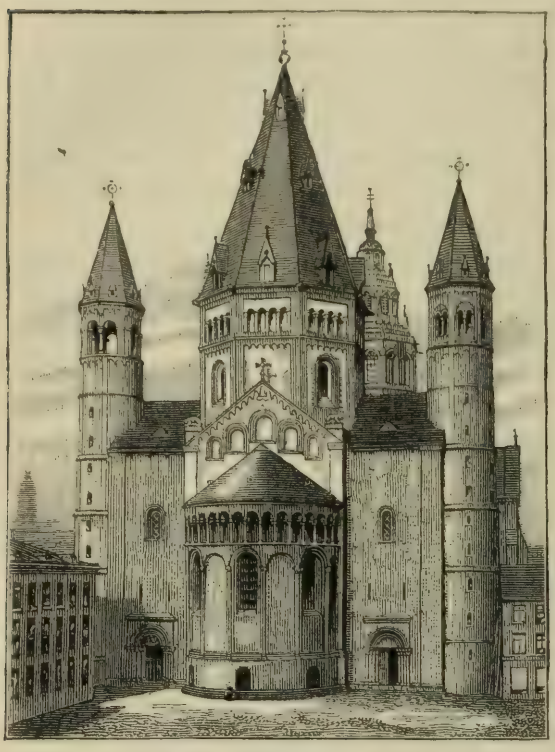
It appeared, however, that what with marching and countermarching, the later communications had not yet reached Enrico. Upon which, Fieramosca was graciously pleased to be conciliated and—pending Clelia's awakening—embraced Clelia's brother.

When the first part of Enrico's news was told his mother, she was rather shaken, then extremely angry, and said that Clelia should be brought to marry Signor Biagio, after all. But when Enrico informed her that, in that case, he himself could not marry Mrs. Walford, who vowed that she would have no brother-in-law but Fieramosca, the Signora Maria lowered her colours at once.

But she never fairly forgave her daughter, who spent a great deal of her time with Mrs. Walford, in consequence. And, in the refined and charming companionship of that lady, both her mind and her character developed, thus rendering her more delightful than ever to Fieramosca, when marriage brought to a happy end, the story of that gallant warrior's perplexities.

IN THE BLACK FOREST.

By Charles W. Wood, Author of "Through Holland," "Round About Norway," &c.



Mainz Cathedral.

We left ourselves in the very middle of the lovely Angenbachthal, where the wanderer may loiter amidst untrodden paths, and revel in the glades and depths of a vast forest.

From this varied and beautiful valley we issued forth on to the interesting but less striking Wiesenthal. All the different features of the road, noted the previous day in coming from Schopfheim stood out again familiarly, with a sort of friendly home feeling about them. For it is seldom that you travel a road twice over in the Black Forest, unless you have taken up your abode there; or are making more than a passing stay in any particular district or spot, for the pleasure of seeking and finding its hidden beauties.

And, after all, this is the only way of knowing the Black Forest—of knowing, indeed, any place or country. Many of the best spots, especially in the district before us, lie concealed in little nooks, by-paths and by-ways, that the ordinary tourist never thinks or dreams of. Take Norway, as an example. No one can really be said to know the choicest parts of that fine country who has not explored all the small branches and ramifications of its fjords. There, where few penetrate, or have the chance of penetrating, visions of impossible loveliness exist. Nooks and dells, and stretches of green banks lined with the wild flowers of the wood, sufficient to keep you in a state of ecstasy for weeks and months at a time. And one of the charms of these spots is their absolute seclusion; spots almost untrodden by the foot of man; where the birds will scarce start at your presence, for they have not yet learned the natural enmity that exists between themselves and mankind.

So the beaten tracks, the high roads of the Black Forest, where people meet each other, and most do congregate, are not, as a rule, the gems of the neighbourhood. You travel to a given waterfall or a noted mountain; on your road you pass down the wide and beautiful valley that lies in your way; in the distance you see a path leading up into a narrow, wooded defile; and you wonder whither it would take you, and what disclose; never dreaming that beauties, unheard of, unrecorded, lie within reach of you.

But if you are "doing" a country in the accepted way, these by-paths must be neglected; you can only explore them, get to know them intimately and to love them, by taking up your abode with them



BADENWEILER.

for a longer or a shorter time. And who does this? Not one in ten thousand cares to do it, or is able to do it. Most people wish to see the broad outlines of a country in a given period, generally a limited period; devoting days where they should give weeks, and weeks for months. The minute details that make the beauty and finish of a picture must be left to the imagination.

By far the larger number of people like, as a rule, what they call a "fresh scene" every year, and, therefore, seldom visit twice the same place. The pleasures of living over again your first impressions are unknown. Nay, it may be said that many of them have no impressions, first or second. More, far more than half of those who travel, do so for the mere excitement of rushing about. Of the real beauties of nature, with all their elevating and inspiring thoughts, that

exquisite soul-pleasure which tongue cannot well utter or pen express, they are unconscious. It is not born within them; they are not in sympathy with it. They see the violet, but the subtle fragrance, so fleeting that a first inhalation seems to rob it of its perfume, they miss altogether. "We can only understand Shakespeare by the Shakespeare that is within us."

Yet it is something, it is even a great privilege, to know merely the broad outline of a country; and it seems to me that any one going through the Black Forest with only a limited time at his command, could not do better than sketch out his plan as follows:

Baden-Baden may be made the starting-point. Some days should be given to this neighbourhood, which abounds in excursions. There are lovely forest walks within easy distance; short mountain excursions; ruined castles, and castles not in ruins (such as the Favorita), crammed with antique furniture, and decorated walls, and painted ceilings, and wonderful old-stained glass, and treasures of old china, enough to drive anyone distracted with envy and longing and admiration.

Having thoroughly done Baden-Baden, the traveller's next point should be Triberg, going round by the Murgthal, and taking care that no clever coachman misses it for the sake of a short cut. Gradually he will get round to Achern, visit the Mummelsee, and get on to Allerheiligen, a wild, mountainous, lovely and romantically wooded district. Thence he will pass on to Griesbach and Rippoldsau, through Hornberg on to Triberg.

At Triberg he will regulate his stay by time and inclination; not omitting, above all things, to do the railway journey between Triberg and Hornberg, to and fro, going beyond Triberg, if he pleases, as far as St. Georges or Villingen. This can be done in less than a day, and it is one of the loveliest bits of railway travelling in existence, within anything like a reasonable distance.

From Triberg he will go down the Simonswald valley; and if he is wise he will secure an outside seat on the diligence, where, perched on the top and dashing along at the speed of four good horses, he will be far better placed than would be possible in a carriage or private conveyance of any sort. But he will remember that the Simonswald and the best part of the scenery comes only after passing Furtwangen. At Furtwangen, he might, "if so disposed," look up the house of *Lamy Sohne*, and the youth with the broad, jolly face, who will show him over his factory, and set all his birds and organs going for the mere sake of giving pleasure. That youth was a credit to human nature.

After leaving Furtwangen, if he finds himself under the care of the fat, oldish, red-faced and good-tempered little courier, he will congratulate himself.

At the end of the Simonswald he will reach Waldkirch, after that paradisiacal drive, where the fruit trees grow on either hand; rich plums, ripe pears, and rosy apples, green-coated walnuts and prickly

chestnuts, all crying out to be gathered; tempting the sons as well as the daughters of Eve, in this 19th century, even without the serpent's aid.

At Waldkirch he will sleep, if he is wise, for the lovely little place is worth a good many hours' devotion. And, instead of seeking an inn, he will patronize the Pension of St. Margherita, a sort of family hotel, where he may wander up and down the staircases and the large corridors, and people them with many generations of silent nuns; shadowless forms moving with noiseless tread; pale, grave faces; for as even ghostly smiles were banished in the days of their penance and pilgrimage, they would not be likely to cultivate in the spirit the frivolities denied them in the flesh.

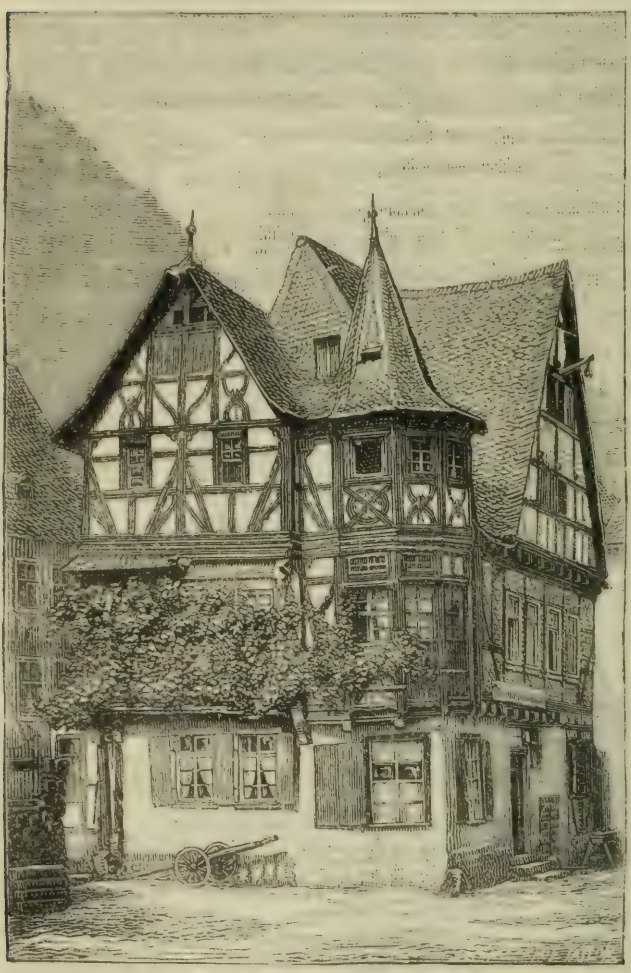
And, loitering in the large, upper, handsome room, cunningly painted, where royalty has deigned to rest and refresh itself, he may awake startling echoes from a piano at the further end, and muse over bygone scenes that weird melodies will conjure up as his fingers wander at will over the keys, inspired by the little halo of romance and antiquity surrounding him within and without the old convent. Then he may go to bed, and find his dreams haunted by those shadowy nuns; one or two of them standing out with pale, ethereal beauty that rouses a wild fever in his heart; until, tossing restlessly from side to side and chasing the phantoms that, like a will o' the wisp, ever elude his grasp, he wakes to the cold reality of a dark and silent chamber.

He thinks he has slept for hours, but the church clock opposite, with its double tongue, twice strikes midnight. A ghostly hour in truth, and he is compelled to rise and light a taper, and throw open the outside shutters to the stars of heaven, to banish the ghostly effect of his vision.

Leaving Waldkirch, he will proceed to Freiburg. Thence by the Höllenthal, the Titisee and the Schluchsee, on to St. Blasien. There are numerous excursions through all this district, which may or may not be made, as already stated, according to time and inclination. Höchenschwand, at least, must be visited. It is a spot worth knowing. Some day the knowledge might become useful. A day, for instance, when health required the restoring properties of high, pure mountain air, without the crowd and trouble and uncertainty of the Engadine valley, or any of those places that, having a local habitation, have gained a fashionable name. Höchenschwand is quiet; perhaps it might even be called essentially dull; it is perfectly free from every kind of excitement, and only they who can dispense with the modern modes and manners for killing time must attempt to seek its pure breezes and fine views.

From St. Blasien the traveller will proceed down the Albthal to Albbrück, there take train for Brennet, and journey up the Wehrathal to Schönau. He will devote some days to Schönau, visit Todtnau, and above all shoot off from Todtmoos up the Angen-

bachthal—that lovely untrodden spot. Then, finding his way into the Wiesenthal, he may turn leftward and visit Zell and Hausen (Hebel's old home), though he will perhaps think this loss of time and trouble unless he has a peculiar fancy for seeing the haunts of poets. Or he may turn to the right, and find his way back to Schönau, where at the Hotel Sonne he will meet with a comfortable room and an intelligent landlord. But—in fair warning and justice it must be recorded—let him in the staircases hold, like Cardinal Wolsey, an aromatic sponge to his nose, or a handkerchief dipped in eau-de-cologne; and under these given conditions the passages will be bearable.



Old House on the Rhine.

You must have something to put up with wherever you go, and, in travelling, the truest philosophy is to make the best of everything; to preserve, even under provocation, a "calm, unruffled mien," and so "censure others by the dignity of excelling." The small contretemps, and the little things that will go wrong in one's travels, are the shadows that serve to bring out into more powerful contrast the brilliant sunshine of all that is lovely and of good report, in ourselves, our surroundings, and our experiences.

The traveller will finally leave Schönau for Badenweiler, where, if it please him, he may take train for Baden-Baden, or Cologne, or any other point from which he may wish to return to "Perfide Albion."

If this plan be followed out, as fair an acquaintance will be made with the Black Forest, as intimate a knowledge of its beauties, as is possible without a prolonged sojourn. It may be done in two or three weeks, but better still in six or eight.

Revenons à nos moutons, or rather to our pastures and prairies.

We last issued out of the Angenbachthal into the Wiesenthal. The little horses dashed onwards towards Schönau with as much energy as if they had only just left the stables, and not thirteen hours ago. Neither whip nor urging needed they. In the gathering gloom—for twilight was now fast falling—we passed down the road by the side of the running stream, and between the dark mountains. Then the lights of the houses—the advanced guard of Schönau as it were—gleamed upon us, and soon after we halted at the hospitable doors of the Sonne.



IN THE BLACK FOREST.

Out came the landlord, with hopes that it had been a pleasant day, and fears that the rain had been too constant a companion. The horses went round to their well-earned rest, as briskly as if they wanted to do it all over again. Fortunately, it takes two to make a bargain. The landlord had moved me a stage higher in the world, but it was a case of closing the door when the steed was stolen — there would be no meeting and no music that night, said mine host. So it came to pass. The night was not made hideous (or harmonious) by this concord of sweet sounds. All was still and calm; the whole place was steeped in silence profound as the grave. The chemist opposite and his little wife, who had come to the window time after time in costumes that nothing but midsummer rendered prudent, nothing but darkness irreproachable, to-night might have taken for their motto, *Requiescat in pace.* Gazing out upon this little world from this upper window, long after its simple inhabitants had sought and found slumber, was like looking out upon a life-in-death kind of scene. The mountains around seemed ponderous, gloomy and portentous: a weird night influence was abroad that almost weighed upon the spirit.

But it was a charming place, this Schönau. Next morning, when compelled to bid it farewell, I felt that it was all too soon. Very much of the neighbourhood had to be left unexplored. I longed to accept the landlord's offer, who proposed to guide me to the summit of the Belchen, if only I would stay yet a few days. The summit of the Belchen, where so fine, so grand a panorama unfolded itself; so many chains of mountains, the Alps, the Jura, the Vorarlberg, the Vosges. But the weather was unfavourable to excursions, and time pressed. I had made far-away promises and engagements; was, as it were, on parole. To fail, would be almost to fail in honour. And, beloved reader, have you not found that where duty calls one way and pleasure another—answer the latter if you will, but the apple you have plucked inevitably turns to ashes in the mouth.

So, the next morning at eight o'clock, the willing horses were once more at the door, brisk and fresh as if yesterday had been to them nothing but a day's holiday. The driver was as proud of them as if all the credit were his own—and perhaps no little of it was due to him. Evidently he took good care of them, and every night made them a bed of straw at least a yard high.

We started for Badenweiler, the landlord begging me to return next year for the purpose of doing one or two valleys that now had to be neglected; valleys, said he, as beautiful as the Wehrathal or the Angenbachthal. Above all, to ascend the Belchen with its wonderful and magnificent panorama. If I did not care to walk up, he would provide an excellent horse. I held out some slight hopes, but committed myself to no rash promises. And we parted.

I was now taking my last drive in the Black Forest, and a grey shadow rested upon it. All last things are sad. The last day of a holiday; the last look at a house we have inhabited; the last goodbye to a friend who has been much to us; the last days of our youth. But oh! saddest of all, the last look at a face we have loved, before it is closed from us for ever. There are some things that but for the life beyond life we should never have courage to bear. In how many hearts is found the echo of that simple epitaph in Worcester cloisters, giving such a history of mental pain and suffering, in the one word Miserrimus?

In spite of the shadow, this last drive was a pleasant one. We wound up into the mountains, the great Belchen always visible; then descended rapidly over a stony road to a primitive village, where the horses were treated to a loaf of bread each, and the coachman—but that needs no record. Then another long, steep ascent over a rugged road, looking down upon fields and pastures where men and women were at work, the latter wearing short, gay petticoats—extra short and extra gay. Did not this indicate that feminine human nature, wherever found, even in these primitive out-of-the-world spots, has one bond of union and sympathy in common—that of vanity? And oh, ye fair ones, vexation of spirit is not far off!

Finally, we passed into a valley with lovely woods on either side, and a shallow, half-dried up stream, with great rocks and boulders strewn about in a sort of wild and rugged chaos. The skies had cleared and the sun was hot and glowing. What would I not have given for this yesterday when going up the Wehrathal? What beauties abounded there now, that then had no existence? However, the woods here to-day were lovely in the sunshine, and waved and whispered to each other in a harmony one might well envy. They were real woods, too, not mere wooded slopes. You could penetrate far into them on the level, the beautiful, inevitable carpet of ferns and flowers all the time beneath your feet.

But I delayed little by wandering. Passing a few villages, and keeping on our way, about eleven o'clock we were in sight of Badenweiler. We left the woods and the shallow stream and the rocky chaos, and launched forth into a more open space. The mountains were still about us, but less near at hand. On the high road, children sat on ponies led by grooms. Pretentious houses reared their magnificent heads. Altogether a suspicious atmosphere of fashion and frivolity began to surround one that was quite in keeping with the reputation of Badenweiler.

It may, indeed, be called the most fashionable watering-place in the Black Forest; more after the order of the much frequented watering-places in Germany than any other spot in this district. At Griesbach and Rippoldsau there was less pretension, a simplicity and freedom only sufficiently appreciated on reaching Badenweiler. Comparisons may be invidious, but at times they force themselves upon you whether you will or not.

Nearing the town, the beauty of its situation was apparent; in this, at any rate, it is perhaps unrivalled. The watering-places in the Kniebis Baths district are all more or less shut in by mountains; a too close proximity, that after a while inevitably becomes oppressive. Badenweiler has all the beauty of the wooded mountains in view, but at a distance which lends them enchantment.

Villas, I have said, were dotted about, ivory and other stalls lined the road, just as they do in other gay watering-places. Passing onwards, the little horses whirled up to the door of the Römerbad. My first sensation was one of positive annoyance at seeing a building so large, and, apparently, so fashionably appointed. Farewell to all the pleasant freedom, simplicity and sans gêne of the Black Forest. I felt inclined to fly back to Schönau and lose myself at the top of the Belchen; but it seldom answers to turn back.

I am bound to say that the interior of the Römerbad did not altogether correspond with the exterior. It was rather a case of the outside of the cup and the platter. At a trifling expense and the exercise of a little taste it might have been made pretty and charming enough. The large hall, or vestibule, possessed all that was necessary for a pleasant room, instead of the bare, barren, chilly lounge it now

was. Here one smoked, talked, and drank beer or wine, wondering the while whether the proprietor was stupid or indifferent, or, like the sleeping beauty in the wood, was steeped in a century of slumber.

The meals were served in primitive style, and might decidedly have been better. On the whole, in this most fashionable of Black Forest watering-places, there was far less comfort than in many an inn comparatively unknown. It seemed as though the hotel had grown and expanded of its own accord, whilst the interior arrangements had remained stationary for the last twenty years.

But there were compensations. The bed-rooms were most of them excellent; the passages were large and airy, the honey was unrivalled, the situation of the hotel everything that could be desired. Above all, the proprietors were so civil and obliging, so really attentive and anxious to please, that one forgave them all other shortcomings; and if I again visited Badenweiler, I should again go to the Römerbad.

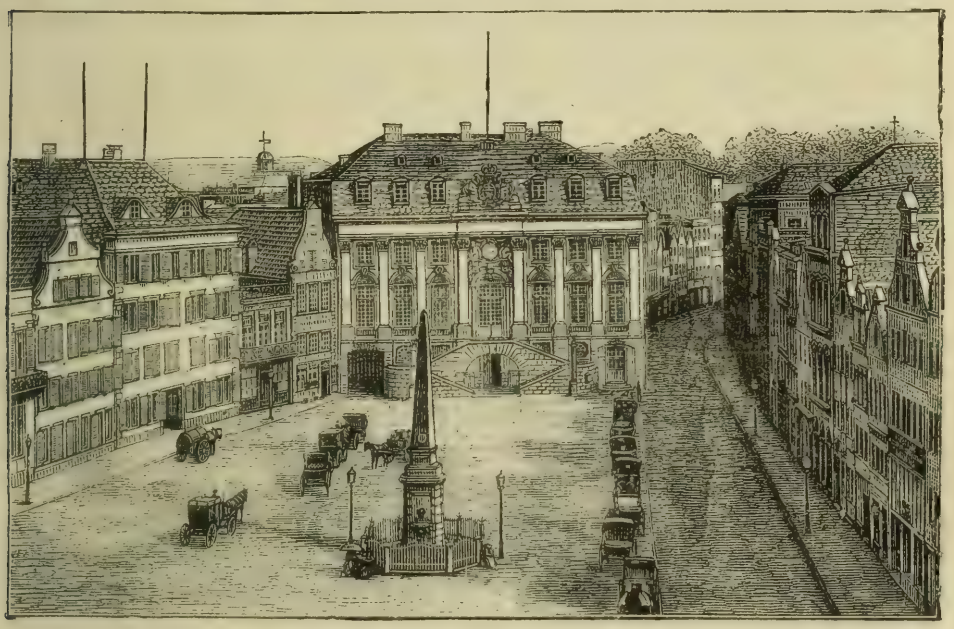
Badenweiler is more accessible than many places in the Black Forest, and to this fact owes some of its popularity. But it has done much on its own account in the way of enterprise. It has quite a magnificent pump-room, ball-room, concert-room; it has a band; it has good baths; it has "antiquities" in the form of the old Roman baths discovered intact some years ago and religiously guarded. It has a pedigree. It has gardens; and a charming avenue of chestnuts, beneath whose shadowy branches one may saunter up and down safe from the midday sun.

So sauntering, a nut was suddenly thrown at our feet, and looking upward, a small squirrel with bushy tail and bright eyes was gazing down from a tall tree, as if for all the world he took in the humour of the joke he was playing upon us. For the nut, on examination, proved to be a bad one. The cunning little squirrel had known that well enough.

We were three on whom the little squirrel had played his practical joke. My companions I had met at Schaffhausen, and now again at Badenweiler. How it sometimes happens that, in travelling, we make pleasant chance acquaintances. Our lives are thrown together for days; we become comparatively intimate; there is a sympathy, a power of "synchronizing" that might ripen into a closer bond, with time and opportunity. But, suddenly, the lines diverge again; the spell is broken; a certain blank has to be filled up. Might we not enlarge upon the Undeveloped Friendships of life? Who knows all the sweets and pleasures we miss in this way? Will the threads be gathered together and taken up and woven into warp and woof in the next world?

The waters of Badenweiler are used both externally and internally. A favourite remedy is the whey cure, and people rise up in the morning with the spirit of earnest infatuation for their glass of whey or milk, and repeat the dose so many times during the day.

The forest walks are numerous. You may wander about the hill and lose yourself in paths that lead apparently to nowhere; paths that seem to exist only to lure you on—whether to fortune or to fate, those know who have found the end. We wandered, two of us, up one of these tempting, mysterious tracks until we reached a maze where wood and tangle and bracken crackled and rustled beneath our feet, only to turn back at last in despair of ever finding a goal or the summit of the hill. But every now and then we came to a spot where a view lovely and far-reaching met the eye. Badenweiler at our feet; the ruined castle built by the Romans for the protection of their baths, rising picturesquely and romantically by the side of the hotel; stretching far beyond, a vast, wide-spreading



BONN.

plain, watered by the ever-lovely Rhine, the distance bounded by those graceful Vosges mountains, with their soft, wavy, long-drawn undulations.

Undoubtedly there is much that is pleasant and attractive about Badenweiler. Visitors make themselves very happy here during their sojourn. The season, to-day, was almost over, people were leaving; most, indeed, had left already. That very morning an American group had departed with a great show of ceremony, rustle, luggage, carriages, éclat, and *douceurs*. The châtelaine (may the word be permitted without loss of caste?) of the party had gone about the salle à manger and other rooms, dropping substantial showers of gold pieces into the hands of every asphyxiated waiter she could summon from the most invisible shades, from the highest to the lowest. The whole was done with that wonderful air of grande dame dispensing favours that was highly entertaining. Then there was much arrang-

ing of places and settling of seats, and the carriages moved off in a procession of two or three, amidst the bows, obsequiences, drop-down-deadness of manner of the assembled establishment.

It is getting a serious matter in these days to travel in anything like comfort and decency. Unless things take a turn (that mysterious contingency that never happens : these kind of things never do take a turn) few except millionaires, Americans, merchant princes, Lord Mayors, Aldermen, and the like, will venture forth to claim acquaintance with the seven wonders of the world. This luxury of the age ; this incessant cry of the grasping horse-leech, "Give ! give !" Oh, the pity of it !

Badenweiler was one of my last impressions of the Black Forest. I do not think it a bad place to finish up with. More fashionable than the rest of this pleasant district, it paves the way to the world we are re-entering. And, certainly, in point of beauty, few spots are more favoured.

It is also an easy matter to get from thence to any given part in the outer world. You may take train for France, Belgium, or any of the ports from which one embarks for England. An hour's journey by omnibus or carriage, through a picturesque country, roads lined here and there with magnificent avenues of trees, and you find yourself at the small town and station of Mulheim.

I booked for Mayence, and there rested the night; wandered about the old-fashioned streets, enjoyed the old cathedral, the gay scene of the women selling their butter and eggs under its very shadow in the Marché. From Mayence I took boat down the Rhine for Bonn, passing all the spots so familiar to every one. But, as fate would have it, sudden squalls were the order of the hour; icy cold winds, and showers of hail and sleet and drenching rain that robbed everything of its beauty, made everyone look blue, every one's teeth chatter. And the assemblage ; the mutilated Queen's English ; the exceptions in the silent aspirate that never existed before, and seemed to herald in new rules and regulations ! Will the School Board at least do us this good—that in the next generation all classes shall speak their own language with some degree of propriety and correctness ? No, never. There is an ingrained want of fineness of temperament and perception in the Englishman that he will never lose, never get the better of. All Celtic nations have a certain quickness of disposition, a certain refinement that redeems them from vulgarity down to the lowest rank. The Englishman alone, of the prevalent class, has it not, and will never have it.

I was glad to reach Bonn, that charming spot, with its pleasant environs, where one can dream under the statue of Beethoven, and before the house he lived in. There had been a fête the previous day, and the streets were still decorated with flags and garlands of flowers ; one saw it in a gala dress none but continental towns know how to assume. The next morning I went on by train to Cologne ;

and soon the tall spires of that majestic cathedral loomed up in the surrounding plains and above the fortifications of the old town.

So I had returned to the spot from which, so to say, I had started. But having had enough of the crossing viâ Queenborough and Flushing, I chose the rail from Cologne to Brussels; passed through that bright, pleasant capital at five in the morning, when all the town was yet hushed in sleep; and was soon on the way to Calais.

Alas! the journey was now dull and prosy enough. The Black Forest, with its lovely valleys, and pine-clad hills, and pleasant resting-places, was a dream of the past, but clothed with all the realities of a waking dream. And our waking dreams, like those visions of the night that haunt our slumbers, must have their end. The seasons succeed each other in due course—day and night, sunrise and sunset have their appointed times; the sea its boundaries. You and I, dear reader, have our appointed time also; we know it not; but in a certain Record it is marked, and when the hour strikes, a call, unheard by other ears, will summon us, let us hope, to beauties of which this earth is but a faint reflection. Here we must ever have thorns with our roses; pleasure and pain attend us hand-in-hand.

Meanwhile, let us be thankful for all the beauties of this earth, great as the human mind can well grasp, showered upon us by the Creator in wisdom and love with an abundance which makes life itself almost a daily miracle. Let us not only see them, but endeavour to realize the marvels, clear and hidden, that they contain. Depend upon it, we shall rise from the contemplation better, higher men and women than we were before.

Finally, the Black Forest is not by any means one of the grandest, most sublime spots of earth; yet I have heard some travellers say that it has given them emotions and sensations they never experienced elsewhere. Most certainly it is well worth visiting. And to the disciple of the Æsthetic school (a school decreasing, let us hope, as far as its effeminate follies are concerned) it especially commends itself. For he may be refreshed at the sparkling streams that abound; he may contemplate the pearly dew-drops that tremble and glisten on the exquisite ferns and flowers that bestrew his path; and he may feast on the perfume of the most luscious wild raspberries and strawberries this world can yield.

THE END.

ONLY A SUMMER VISIT.

By the Author of "Gentleman Stephens."

DANGERFIELD PARK was a fine country place belonging to the Danbys, and it looked its best one fine August afternoon that came in a spell of set-fair summer weather. It had been coincident now with the visit to Dangerfield Park of Lady Violet Kneller, who, having lately formed a friendship with one of the Danby girls, had come to stay with her friend and make the acquaintance of the rest of the family.

The present owner of Dangerfield Park, handsome Howard Danby, had gone up to Scotland a fortnight ago to favour the grouse with his presence, but three stalwart brothers yet remained to do honour to Lady Violet's visit. Mrs. Danby was a fond, indulgent mother to them all, but duly embued with a belief in the perfection and general infallibility of her son Howard. Her two daughters were amiable girls, who have little to do with these pages. The time had gone so quickly over the heads of these young people, and they had been so merry and intimate and happy together, it would have been curious if all hearts had come out of it unscathed. If farther reason for peril were wanting, Lady Violet was beautiful, bright, and good, an only child, and doubly orphaned since her early childhood; and although the family estates had passed with the title to her father's next male heir, she was possessed of a fine property in one of the fairest of Welsh valleys, and was therefore an heiress of no small importance.

Little indeed, however, does heiress-ship count beside beauty and goodness in the eyes of an unspoilt boy of twenty, therefore let no suspicion rest on the name of Lionel, youngest son of the house of Danby, who was quite hopelessly in love with Lady Violet. His passion gave the family much amusement, and Lady Violet found no other treatment of her lover possible than to pet him and laugh at him alternately. It answered, however, perfectly; his devotion made its own happiness; and having closed with the rebuffs of fortune, and recognised the hopelessness of his suit, the general laugh against him was powerless to hurt, and he was even beguiled into joining it himself.

The next son, Edward, had only a second affection free to offer, if Venus herself had appeared on the scenes, his first being centred in a pack of otter hounds of which he was the joyful master. He was full of deference for the sex, however, and had greatly enjoyed having Lady Violet at his side when he drove Howard's four-in-hand here and there during the last fortnight, sending them cheerily along the level roads with a secret pride in his own skill in their manipulation.

The eldest of the trio was stalwart like his brothers, as far as inches and proportion went, but he had been delicate from boyhood, and so often face to face with the Arch-Enemy, that it was a matter of no small surprise to him sometimes to find himself now, past thirty, still walking in the flesh about the park at home. In Howard's absence, he had taken the trouble of the various comings and goings of late on his own shoulders, and the result had given universal satisfaction.

This afternoon, Lady Violet and he, returning from a walk, came out through a bend of the path into sunshine from the shade of some trees. It was a favourite walk, and one that wound round a craggy hill of no great eminence, rising close to one side of the Hall. Masses of foxglove made the hillside bright to-day, and where the road at intervals wound into ravines, were groups of mountain ash-trees, the berries of which had yellowed on the way to redness.

Gerard was smooth-shaven all to a thick, brown moustache. His eyes were blue and remarkably expressive, but self-control had so far triumphed in his character, that the most usual expression of his face was one of a nonchalant and half amused observation of the ways and doings of his fellow-creatures. Lady Violet's characteristic expression, on the contrary, was one of sweet earnestness, while her smile, when it came, was so swift, sympathetic and bright as to be especially alluring. She was not smiling now; over her beautiful grey eyes the lashes were drooped, and a compression of pain was about her lips.

"I cannot believe that doctors are so useless as to be unable to deal with your case," she exclaimed. "You should not speak of your health as you are doing now."

"Why not?" said he; "doctors are divided into two classes, the hopeful and despairing. I have tried both, and considerably prefer the despairing. They give one the chance now and then of a pleasant surprise, while I have been ready before now to administer slow poison to the hopeful fellows in return for the disappointments to which they have laid me open."

"But by your own showing," said Lady Violet, eagerly, "they have been in the main more right than wrong. You may yet have many years before you of usefulness in the world."

Gerard gave a little laugh. "I cannot flatter myself that the world would be much poorer if my work in it came to an end," he said. "My brothers have each careers cut out for them. Howard has this place and the duties of a landed proprietor to attend to. Ted has devoted himself to field-sports, and I do not despise them as a profession, whatever the world in general may do. Lionel aims at being an army doctor, and will, I think, do well in that line. But for myself, all my earlier years were passed in futile attempts to enter one profession after another in defiance of health; and, now, having failed in all, thanks to that ever-recurring impediment, and not

possessing brains enough to write a book or discover a new solar system, I should be rather a fool to suppose myself very necessary to the existing order of things."

"Then value your life, if you do not care to do so for yourself, for the sake of those who love you," said Lady Violet, in a low and troubled voice. She had strung herself up to say the words which meant so much more to her than they outwardly betrayed. It seemed that her riches and health and prosperity were creating such a barrier between two destinies that longed to meet, that she felt well-nigh tempted to grasp at royal prerogative with the noble self-abandonment of true love, and speak out plainly what was in her heart.

They passed again under the shade of trees, and so the only time in which he had spoken to her of his health came and went.

Some years previously chance had led him, when on a visit near to Lady Violet Kneller's home, of Glanirwon, to spend an evening there that had served as a bright initial letter to this later acquaintance.

Emerging from the trees, they were talking of this former meeting, and she again looked bright, for he spoke of Glanirwon in much the tone she would have chosen for him to use. "I don't believe it is ever daylight there," he said, "and I even doubt its real existence at all, it comes back to me after such an uncanny fashion. It stands out in my memory as about the most perfect scene of beauty I ever beheld, dews and moonlight, deer and river mists, and I suggested to my friend that we should cut the dinner-party and dance, where you were all strangers to me, and take our pleasuring in your park instead. He did not seem to see it, so we went into the house, and you made it so pleasant that, behold, I forgot all about moonshine and everything else in less than half-an-hour."

Lady Violet laughed.

"Are you always so merry down in Wales, and does the moon never get into the fourth quarter there?" he asked.

"Never," she answered him, according to his jesting spirit. "It is always full moon there. If you doubt me come and see for yourself."

"Yes, I will come," he said, laughing, "either in the flesh or out of it. Magical arts should be detected and exposed. It is only in Wales such practices can linger," and so they passed, laughing, into shade again.

When once more they returned to sunshine the house was full in sight, and on the terrace below them the rest of the party were assembled, grouped round a tall, handsome man, who, standing beside Mrs. Danby's chair, placed on a rug of leopard skins and scarlet, looked monarch of all he surveyed.

"What a remarkably handsome man!" exclaimed Lady Violet, involuntarily, as they paused to look down on the terrace. Gerard did not speak for a moment or so, then said:

"Yes, you are right. It is my eldest brother, 'Howard the mag-

nificent,' as we sometimes call him." Lady Violet laughed and blushed.

"I really could not know that," she said, in deprecation, "when I thought he was in Scotland at this very moment."

"Of course not," said he; "and you only expressed the general sentiment. Come, shall we go down and join them?"

Steps leading down to the terrace were cut in the rocky hillside. As he put out his hand to lead her down, he looked up, and their eyes met. If they had held by the old time-honoured language read there, they might have been safe, but—

"He does not really care for me," she thought, and "I must not let her suspect she is everything to me," said the other, with an honourable man's repugnance to bid anyone share his invalid career, and an unusually modest estimate of his own attractive powers. Yet both wished those few steps would last longer, and went down hand-in-hand in a lingering content.

"So that is over," said Gerard, with more emphasis than he was aware, as their hands fell apart

"The steps down, do you mean?" she asked.

"The descent to a lower level," he replied; and the next moment they had joined the rest of the party, and it seemed to Gerard some dozen voices, his own among them, were introducing Howard to Lady Violet Kneller.

Sun-browned, dark, and handsome in face, and commanding of mien, Howard the magnificent was farther endowed with a good address, and welcomed Lady Violet with some empressement. In lively and agreeable manner the talk flowed on, and few ladies would have been insensible to the concern displayed by such a handsome man as Howard for the due enjoyment of his guest.

"What! had they not gone to the polo match at Q——, nor taken her yet to Ivy Cross Abbey, the great lion of the neighbourhood? Why, what had they all been about? The last omission must be rectified forthwith, and what day should they choose for it?"

"Where are you off to, Gerard?" said his sister Ethel, "you must be tired after your walk, and tea will be out directly."

"None for me, thanks," said Gerard. "I have got to be at the stables for half-an-hour or so," and he strolled off in that direction.

Quite two hours later he was returning along the shrubberies when he was met and joined by Lionel, a fair young picture to look on; fresh as morning itself, and without a suspicion on his often smiling lips of the moustache he so earnestly coveted to see there. The brothers walked on in silence for a few moments, and then Gerard said:

"Prithee, why so mute, young lover?"

"As well mute as anything else," returned Lionel, "and I think the world is just the most disgusting, disappointing piece of humbug that ever was."

"Which being interpreted means," said Gerard, "'and Ahab, the king, slept with his fathers, and Ahaziah, his son, reigned in his stead.'"

"Exactly so," said Lionel, smiling, "and I dare say I should not care much, only that Howard always *will* come King Ahaziah so awfully strong, it riles a fellow so."

"Well, my son," said Gerard, "as far as your chances in the desired quarter are concerned I fancy it does not matter much whether he is here or not, and it is always well to face the inevitable."

"Oh, I am not saying my chances were hopeful, and for that matter," he added, grandly, "it is an open question whether I should have cared to tie myself down so early."

Here came a derisive laugh from his brother which he had some difficulty in not joining.

"But what I say is, who was to think of Howard turning up just now? We have had an awfully jolly time of it, and none of us wanted a change, not she or anyone," said Lionel, discarding a nominative, "and it will all go to the dogs now. When a fellow *says* he is in Scotland shooting grouse, why cannot he stay there, and be hanged to him!"

"What brought him down?" said Gerard. "Did you hear?"

"He said he came as soon as he heard Lady Violet settled to stay on," said Lionel; "does he think no one is fit to entertain her but himself? She has done very well without him, it strikes me."

"She would make just the kind of wife Howard is looking out for," remarked Gerard, coolly. "It is not impossible you may have her as a sister-in-law, if that will please you. You had better bear it in mind, and as for Howard he has only acted very naturally, and much as you or I might have done in his place. There goes the dressing gong. We are just in time: cheer up, Lionel, my boy, all is not over yet."

"Gerard," said Lionel, throwing an impulsive hand on his brother's shoulder as they turned into the house, "I'll be hanged if I do not think you are the best fellow in the world. You make me friends with myself and everyone else when I would defy the Archbishop of Canterbury to do it otherwise. Here, Judson," to the butler in the hall, officiating at the gong, "stop that old tom-tom of yours this minute, or I'll ——," and as a finish to the sentence he threatened the man with his cricketing cap just taken off and now rolled into a ball.

For all reply, Judson bestowed on him a fatherly smile of indulgence, and looked affectionately after the two fine young men as they mounted the staircase, for while he believed greatly in all the house of Danby, Gerard and Lionel were his especial favourites.

Hard it is to stay the fleeting perfume of a violet, and not less difficult to keep an atmosphere serene into which a disturbing element has entered. It was even as Lionel had feared, and Lady Violet Kneller's visit did not go on as brightly nor give such universal satis-

faction as before the arrival of Howard. It came about as naturally as water finding its own level. Almost insensibly, and on the very first evening, the large party that had usually stayed long and late around the piano was deserted first by one, and then another, until only Lady Violet and Howard were left there in possession. So it was in walking, driving—everything that befel on the next day and the next. It seemed to Howard only in the right and natural order of things that the best of everything should be the undisputed, ay, and the undivided, portion of Howard Danby, Esquire, and that with second fiddles and half loaves his brothers should be more than content.

Gerard had quickly divined that Howard's eagerness to return home ere Lady Violet's visit should progress farther held a meaning within it, and the hours were not slow in confirming his opinion. Whatever was going forward, Ivy Cross Abbey, or tennis, or dance, Howard's place was ever at Lady Violet's side, and his most dazzling gifts and graces displayed for her edification.

It is not easy to decline the attentions of a host, and a lover has a trump card put into his hand when he woos in that capacity. Courtesy laid its trammels on Lady Violet, and made her Howard's companion in drag, or dance, or dinner, when choice would have led her far a-field; and it was the less easy to escape from the trap gathering round her that from force of family tradition or other causes none of the other brothers came forward to interfere with Howard's right. There was one who feared not Howard one iota, and felt that power within him that justifies courage and arms for any combat, but Gerard was deterred by other motives from seeking Lady Violet's preference for himself.

That malady which had haunted all his previous career stood now like a barrier between him and the path that inclination would have made him follow. Even now, and as it seemed to him, accelerated by Howard's return, some premonitory symptoms he had learned well to understand were warning him that another struggle for life might not unlikely be at hand, whose issue no one could foresee. The slight estimation in which he held his own powers of attraction, made him singularly blind to the danger he ran, while concealing his own love, of cruelly wounding that of another; and so as the days went on, he refrained more and more from joining in what was going forward, or seeking Lady Violet as he had done at first.

One day, at luncheon, an expedition for the afternoon was being discussed, and a difficulty arose to find seats in the carriages for all the party.

"Put me out of your calculations," said Gerard, "that will simplify matters. I must stay at home to-day."

"Ah, that will set it all straight," said Howard, "I suppose you have been overdoing yourself, Gerard, and are seedy again. So you are quite right, old fellow, to stay where you are."

"I have letters to see to," replied Gerard, going on with his task

of balancing biscuits with great nicety on his setter's nose; but one at the table noticed with a yearning at her heart not easily endured that there was unwonted pallor to-day in Gerard's face. His speech she observed was not frequent, for all that he kept up his usual bantering tone towards Lionel and others, and he strolled away out of doors by himself as soon as the meal was over.

Lady Violet felt ready to do some desperate thing. Let a noble-hearted woman see the man she loves in physical suffering, and she longs at once to assert her right to be at his side, and minister to and sustain him. She, too, wandered out alone in hopes that some chance meeting might give her an opportunity of easing the weight at her heart by some word of spoken sympathy; and while framing in her mind how this was to happen, she suddenly came upon the object of her solicitude seated on a garden bench in a hollow of rhododendrons

He was looking away from her towards the distant hills, his arm thrown across the rustic back of the seat, and his hand slightly supporting his head; but he turned on hearing her footstep. His face was calm and self-contained as ever; but his solitary reverie had left on it an elevation such as she had never seen there before, as the light lingers in the west, although for us the sun has set.

Her heart sank within her. The immortals seemed to her already claiming him for those higher regions where human love and sympathy may not follow until their resurrection into feelings purer and less passion-tossed than those of earth. Not one word of the speeches she had rehearsed came to her now.

He rose up with his usual smile of greeting, and would have had her join him on the rustic seat, and when she declined saying she must prepare for the drive, he walked beside her towards the house. She knew it was useless to remonstrate, that his good breeding would not permit her to return alone, she felt humiliated, annoyed, disappointed, and to nothing but the merest trivialities could she give utterance.

How different to that day on the hillside, when grave and gay topics had mingled so easily, and they had jested of another meeting at Glanirwon! She could scarcely have named the place to-day to save her life, and felt, with every step she took how enforced was the escort on his part. He gave her little cause to think so, for he kept the conversation up far better than she, and walked with deliberate steps when once he had ascertained the time fixed on for the expedition would not oblige her to hurry.

It was only when they reached the terrace, and saw Howard standing outside the house looking towards them, that she found courage to say:

"I hope it is really letters that keep you at home to-day, not any indisposition?"

"No, thank you, I am all right," said Gerard, deliberately, "and

the letters are not a poetical fiction, for once. You will see some country in your drive to-day more like your Welsh scenery than is usual with us, so I hope it will get the seal of your approbation."

Howard was waiting for them, watch in hand, and challenged Lady Violet's punctuality to be ready at the given time. She promised compliance, and left them with an aching heart, both brothers turning to watch her graceful figure as she passed into the Hall.

Do what he would, Howard could not fail to recognise Gerard as an equal, and that he felt his brother in reality his superior was perhaps the reason he did not oftener seek his society and confidence. Now, however, he was just enough provoked at Lady Violet's delay to hazard a remark which might or might not be welcome to the hearer. That leisurely walk along the terrace had looked more satisfactory than it really had been.

"Shall you congratulate me, Gerard," he asked, twirling a geranium leaf between his fingers, to affect indifference, "if I prove successful in that fair quarter, and present you all with a sister-in-law?"

"You would certainly be in a position to merit very much congratulation," said Gerard, coolly. "Do you think your chances then so good?"

"Well, perhaps, it is premature as yet to talk of them," with the manner and smile that insinuate much, "but I grant that I am not quite hopeless."

The two men faced and eyed each other without flinching, and a handsomer pair of brothers could rarely be seen, although those who once staked their faith for the blue eyes would never condescend again to the black.

"You have made a choice that would do any man credit," said Gerard, "whatever the result may be. Perhaps, as you say, it would be premature yet to prophesy about that."

They parted, and Howard was soon urging his pretty horses along the park with Lady Violet at his side, while Gerard sat at his desk and steadily wrote a letter that did indeed savour less of fiction than of fact. Once he paused in his writing, and while he caressed that heavy moustache of his unconsciously with his hand, gazed out of the window and dreamed and hoped and wooed and won in fancy all against his better judgment and conscious intention. Along a distant stretch of the road commanded by his window the carriages went gaily on their way. Howard's tandem led the way, on the seat beside him was a lady. Gerard bent his head over his desk again, and wrote his letter to the end without a second pause.

Two evenings later, the family had dispersed for the night, and when Judson came to barricade the hall door, on the steps outside were Gerard and Lionel, and the former taking on himself to fulfil that office, dismissed the old man with a kindly good-night.

Gerard leant against a pillar whilst Lionel measured his length in

an easy attitude across the steps, and the perfume of their cigars made the night fragrant. The day had been unusually warm for September, making the cool darkness the more refreshing now, and the sky was thickly studded with stars. When earth fails, it naturally draws us to look to heaven. The brothers gazed upwards as intently as any saint or astronomer could have done, and as they looked, a shooting-star—that most pathetic break in the calm and majesty of the heavens—passed half across the sky before them, and melted into the blue.

"There you go," said Lionel, not too poetically. "Vanished like my hopes, luckless suitor that I am!"

"As brief, perhaps, but rather more bright, I imagine, than those hopes could have been at any time," returned Gerard. "Never mind, Lionel, it is a good sign to aim high for the first love."

"First, indeed!" said Lionel. "Likely story, that, at twenty. I should not care so much if Howard would but let her alone. I wish you had gone in yourself to win her, Gerard; she is much too good for him; but you are different, and I believe she likes you best of the lot of us, after all."

"Rather a moot point I should say," said Gerard, "so we will put it aside, if you have no objection, for another. Lionel, has it never struck you we are one too many here sometimes?"

"As how, for instance?" said Lionel.

"Well, we thin our woods," said Gerard, "to give fresh development to the trees that remain, and it might be wise for us brothers to take a hint from the notion. Three of us very often as it is do the work of two, and two of one, and the upshot of it is I am going away."

"Going away!" exclaimed Lionel, sitting upright in his surprise, and trying vainly to scan his brother's face in the uncertain light. "*You*, of all people, Gerard, whom none of us wish to spare. What do you mean?"

"You know about this expedition of Lord A.'s to Egypt," answered Gerard, quietly. "He wanted a kind of upper secretary, sagacious adviser, and highly-gifted companion, so I fancied the post would suit my style of genius. In short, I may as well tell you at once it is all arranged between us, and as he is a very good fellow, and we always get on together, I fancy I shall enjoy the expedition exceedingly."

"But, Gerard," said Lionel, in a voice from which all jocularity had subsided, "they say that expedition will stay out for two or three years at the very least."

"I know it," said Gerard, "and that is partly the reason I am going. There is such remonstrance in your tone, my dear boy, that it forces me to speak more frankly. As my health now stands I do not believe my life is worth six months' purchase from this moment, but a complete change of some years to such a climate as Egypt

might prolong my valuable life indefinitely, and one has even heard of marvellous cures effected there. It will be worth putting it to the test whether to live or die, I suppose, and either way no great harm can come of it."

"No great harm!" ejaculated Lionel. "For you to go away for years, taking all the brightness from here with one fell swoop"—his voice broke there for a moment—"exiling yourself with strangers in a foreign land, there to fight it out alone with life or death! Gerard, do you want to break my heart?"

And Lionel flung his unfinished cigar from him to fall wherever it listed.

"There is no need to draw the picture so darkly," said Gerard, with determined cheerfulness. "The doctors here, as you know, emulate each other in their incapacity to set me right, and if this chance succeeds—as why should it not?—you would grant it worth the trial. But take the other alternative, and what then? What can it matter whether we say good-bye a little sooner or a little later? We are not sentimentalists. Our faith and affection as brothers need to be no firmer than now. I rely on you never to give me cause to feel less confidence in meeting than now in parting from you, and I think you may rely equally on me. The rest is not in our hands, and if our parting were to be this night we might go far before finding a more fitting moment."

Not a word came from Lionel for some moments; then:

"You are going very soon, Gerard," said he, while a sudden mist seemed to him to obscure the brilliant throbbing of those stars above.

"The expedition has been hurried forward," said Gerard. "I go up to town to-morrow, to inspect the outfit I have ordered and get the remaining necessaries; after that there will scarcely be time for more than to run down to take leave before we sail. I did not know this before to-day, but it is perhaps the best way of doing it. In the morning I shall see my mother before I go and tell her all about it, but I want you to know it now, for I count on you, Lionel, not to let me be missed by her, or my sisters, or anyone—not even by poor old Judson," said Gerard, with a smile.

There was silence again for some moments, and then Lionel spoke in a voice full of pain and passion, but also with a kind of enthusiasm ringing through it.

"Gerard, I had rather be you than anyone else I ever heard of. You are as much above the rest of us as those stars up there. No honours could make you higher than you are, and death or life it is all one to you. I would rather be like you than anyone on earth."

"My career has been one of such marked success that I can easily believe you, you arch-flatterer!" said Gerard, but he spoke with indulgence, for he knew that the words had come from the depths of as honest and warm a heart as ever beat, and that his brother's eyes, looking up to the starry multitude of the sky, were

full of tears. Lionel had not outgrown the age of hero-worship—it is not on record that he ever did—and he had not chosen his hero far amiss. A little longer they lingered on those steps together—a little longer yet after saying they must go.

Next day, after he had gone, the news of his plans set the whole household in commotion, and the general consternation and regret over them seemed to Lady Violet the best satire on the uselessness of Gerard's life as described by himself.

"If opportunities had been given him," said she to herself, "he would have been a leader among men. As fate has willed, it is his home and a narrow circle that have owned him and claimed his services, and is he less great for that?"

The Egyptian expedition had indeed hurried forward its movements. In a few days Gerard reappeared to take leave, and the occasion was marked by that regret and hurry, baulking of desire and impotence of speech that seem inseparable to partings that strike deeply.

It was remarked by all that Gerard looked worn and white; but he said it was only from the over-work incident to this forced march on Lord A.'s part.

And Lady Violet was aware she had never realized what misery meant until to-day. Not a word of Glanirwon, of moonlight memories in the past or meetings in the future! He was going, and even simplest words of sympathy were frozen on her lips. He was gone, and she had only hurried forth at the last the things she cared least to say. Time and the hour tortured her until the solace of night was gained. Then, sleepless and despairing, she gauged again and again the bitter result of a time that had promised so fairly. "Lionel would undertake impossible things for my sake," she murmured. "Howard surely wants me to be his wife; Gerard goes away without a word, to die in a distant country!"

And next day, in good truth, Howard laid himself and his prospects, figuratively speaking, at her feet, and never had the magnificent one, through all his prosperous career, been more taken aback than by the very distinct refusal he met with from Lady Violet.

So time went on, and before six months were over, Gerard, true to his presentiment, was struggling for life with the disease that, however often baffled before, seemed doomed to conquer now.

The result from the first seemed hopeless; his hold on life was almost gone, and though he hung on between life and death far longer than the doctors had predicted, they said it was but the last grip of vitality so remarkably strong in some constitutions, and that recovery was all but impossible.

When the patient still lived on, they modified this opinion to a certain extent. "He might linger for a while," they said; and so far their sagacity was justified by the event. But the little while grew into a long while, and Gerard had made unquestionable advances towards recovery.

The Solons around him were puzzled—they were, indeed, wholly out of their reckoning; but, to do them justice, they were even yet more pleased, for Gerard at home and abroad, and ill or well, had the mysterious gift of winning hearts. The tenderest care was lavished on him by the strange attendants round, and by his friend Lord A——.

When at length he rose from that sick bed, it was with a very uncertain hold on any earthly future, and it seemed scarcely worth while to traverse the weary stages of convalescence with the enemy still so near. With many a backsliding, with many checks, the stages were, however, travelled, until Gerard was at last as well as he had been when leaving England. And then what was this that the doctors began to hint about, and at last to openly predict—this that his own opinion began to confirm in a resolute way that was indeed new?

They began, these good men, with smiles, instantly qualified by warning shakes of the head, to say that, with care, with a fair trial of the benefits of the Egyptian climate, and their own most skilful treatment, Gerard might yet live to be older than any of them, and enjoy health far better than he had known before. Gerard himself, who had so often faced death calmly, could not quickly trust his voice to thank those that brought him now the message of life—life with its renewed hopes and possibilities, its wonderful God-given opportunities, its glamour and its joy. There are some natures, and these not the least noble, whom joy breaks down as ill-fortune never yet had power to do, who will meet the one with undaunted courage and calm front, the other with bowed knee and with head abased.

Gerard's own heart knew best why he valued this boon of life so highly, but he was slow to believe in its possession, and the doctors had no difficulty in persuading him to lengthen his stay in Egypt as long as prudence required. Until their unanimous voices had again and again ratified that hope that they had given him, until prudence itself had no further precautions to urge, Gerard remained in Egypt, then, fleet as a greyhound released from the slips, he took his way northwards and homewards.

Not much was changed there. One sister had married, Ted was otter-hunting in Wales, Lionel's coveted moustache had come. He had managed to get away from his work to meet his favourite brother on his landing, and bear him back in triumph to Dangerfield Park; and that re-union, so little hoped for, left nothing on Lionel's side to be desired. Little on Gerard's either, only that his desire now was to go forward; his home was only a halting-place, and no longer a goal. Such changes are the inevitable work of years, but large natures such as his do not forsake the old for the new, but rather expand themselves until they take in both alike, like oaks that mark the cycles of time by added rings. They talked together again under the stars, Gerard and Lionel, with unabated confidence

and brighter hopes, and they spoke of Lady Violet Kneller. Lionel had not a little to tell of trifles connected with that never-to-be-forgotten visit long ago. In spite of his moustache, his face was as boyish and sunshiny as ever; but, for all that, Lionel was a shrewd observer, and drew his conclusions sometimes with remarkable nicety. There was not much, perhaps, that was notable in what he said, for Lionel had tact, and Gerard listened almost in silence, and with little comment.

Only when the two brothers stood side by side on the hall steps, before parting for the night, said Gerard to Lionel: "I am going to-morrow down to Wales, and look for Ted and the otter hounds. It was chiefly for that express purpose I came back to England."

"I hope you will find them, then, with all my heart," said Lionel; and both laughed significantly, and knew they were speaking in parables well understood.

Next day Mrs. Danby was not a little perturbed at Gerard's intentions, and thought it great folly on his part to expose his newly-recovered health to the risks consequent on otter-hunting; but Gerard assured her he would observe every caution, and kept his word, since, though he went down to Wales that afternoon, Ted and the otter-hounds beheld him not.

Lady Violet had not married in the years that had passed since his departure. She had tried to forget a certain fine face with its military set of head and heavy moustache, since she found it barred the way against all fresh interests and loves that came near her. She had tried to be resigned to the expected news of a death in a far country with which her life would have no ostensible connection, but in neither effort did she meet with much success. With how little indeed, she only realized when Gerard Danby walked once more at her side through the river mists and under the deer-haunted oaks of Glanirwon.

What he told her there, what he asked and what she answered, need not be specified here. Herne the Hunter heard it perhaps, and the river gods and Pan—but they keep such secrets safely and only hint at them in sweet murmur of water and rustle of bough down in Wales. Anyhow, Gerard and Violet were married after a very brief engagement, and somehow no one who knew the bridegroom ever insinuated that interested motives had led him to seek for the hand of the heiress of Glanirwon.

He had abundant work cut out for him in the management of that fine estate, and it was with a firm and capable hand he ruled his kingdom. That that rule was a beloved one, that Lady Violet and he were the model couple of the country-side may be safely assumed, and no one held the belief more strongly than an aspirant for medical fame in the army, called Lionel, who visited very frequently at Glanirwon, looking always some years younger than his actual age. Ted and the otter-hounds were always welcome too, but Howard was not

quite so frequent a visitor. Each time he came he wondered anew how it was Lady Violet had preferred his brother to himself, until some misgiving grew to mingle with the surprise, and as time went on even Lionel confessed that Howard became less magnificent and more human year by year.

And it was indeed, a merry world that Gerard found down there in Wales, nor did its witchery lose its power, nor were his illusions dispelled, for although the years have now mounted up so that children play under the oaks and by the river, the honeymoon at Glanirwon has never known decrease or fourth quarter, but stands ever at the full.

LOVERS.

THEY stood beside the waterfall,
A day their wedded bliss had seen,
Love was the happy lord of all,
And they his willing slaves I ween.

Said he, "The outer world is far,
O may no touch its life restore!
And thou, my little guiding star,
Shine only on me evermore!"

Said she, "There *is* no world at all—
Only the moss on which we sit,
Only the sleepy waterfall,
And you and I to look at it!"

Said he, "All other love's forgot,
Only the love of you and me;
Our life for other lives is not,
Only for us the earth and sea!"

Said she, "There *are* no other loves:
What other lives than ours can be?
The world to sweetest music moves,
And only moves for you and me!"

Said he, "The music is your sighs,"
Said she, "Your voice the music is."
They look'd into each other's eyes
And seal'd the meaning with a kiss!

E. A. H.

THE STRANGE STORY OF A SMALL BOY.

By the Author of "The Last Elm of the Avenue."

IT all came of my having a railway key and being made to take music lessons.

Thompson gave me the key when he was leaving last term. I don't know how he came by it, or what good it was to him, as he never saw a train except when he went home for the holidays; but he was always talking of the convenience of having such a thing when you were travelling, and hinting at the mysterious penalties the Company might inflict if they caught you using it.

He gave it me in exchange for a bit of Letty's hair (she's my sister, and Thompson was dreadfully in love with her) and a scrap of the bonnet trimming she wore in church. I stole that but had to ask her for the hair, and she brought out a whole bundle and said I might trade away the lot if I chose. "Hair wasn't worn much now."

Music was another thing altogether. Herr Otto Finke was an old friend of my father's, and lived at Luckboro', our market-town.

He took a fancy to me—bother him; and actually persuaded my father and mother to let me come over to Luckboro' every market-day, with my father, for a lesson in German and music. I didn't mind dining with him first (uncommonly queer messes we had, and lots of jam with them)—but the music was simply disgusting—(in the holidays, too!)—and the lessons generally ended by Finke getting to the piano himself, and warbling songs of his Vaterland by the hour. He did so once too often though—and *now* I have got to my story.

We used to come and go between Mosslands and Luckboro' by omnibus. There was a Mosslands station on the line between Luckboro' and London, but my father never went by it if he could help it. When he did, though I had the key with me I never dare use it, and began to think I had made a bad bargain with Thompson.

One Tuesday, however, last winter, Finke got so carried away by his own sweet singing that he kept on long after I ought to have started to meet my father, and then got so remorseful that I thought he was going to cry; or perhaps want to keep me all night.

"Look here," I said, "it doesn't matter. There's a train that gets in as soon as the 'bus. I can catch it if I run—Good-bye!" And off I scudded, one arm in and one out of my top coat, for I was sure he'd object, or want to see me off. I had money, and there *was* a train, which came up long before I had seen all I wanted about the station.

I made a dash at a carriage. It wasn't locked, as I half hoped it

might be, and in I scrambled, but was nearly blown out again by a volley of the strongest language I ever did hear. The train started and jerked me down into a seat before I'd time to get my breath. I was not used to bad expressions, and my fellow-traveller's remarks made my blood run cold.

There were ladies in the carriage, but he didn't seem to mind *that*. He had a red, scowling face, with heavy red eyebrows and bloodshot eyes. All the rest of him was a mass of railway rugs and wraps. I had tumbled over his toes into the middle seat opposite, where I sat scared and speechless, till I caught the eyes of the lady next to him fixed on me.

Ugh! such a bad old face! A tight, cruel mouth, with all sorts of coil-lines about it, and wicked, sharp grey eyes that screwed into one like gimlets. I didn't care much for Redface by this time. I didn't believe he *would* "twist my neck and chuck me out of window" as he suggested; but I hated *her* all over at once, from her sausage-curls—grizzly-grey, two on each side—to her hooked claws of fingers that were twitching away at her knitting-needles, in and out of a big, grey stocking.

"Hush, Sammy," she said, quite sweetly; "the poor child means no harm, and he can easily get out at the next station.—Where are you going to, love?"

I could only gape in reply, and she must have thought I was a softy, for she twisted my ticket clean out of my hand before I knew what she was after.

"Mosslands. Very good. That's the next station. I'll see him safe out, Sammy dear."

Sammy growled an inarticulate response from under his rugs.

The third passenger had neither spoken nor stirred. She sat on the same side as the other two, covered with a big plaid rug, and a blue woollen veil tied over her head. I could make nothing out except that she seemed asleep in a very uncomfortable attitude.

I sat in the middle opposite the old woman. It was so disagreeable, finding her sharp eyes on me while her needles clicked on just the same, that I thought I might as well pretend to go to sleep too. So I curled myself up, and gave one or two nods, and then dropped my face on my arm so that she couldn't see it.

Presently I heard the needles going slower and slower. I peeped, and saw the big bonnet and sausage-curls giving a lurch forward and then backward, once, twice; then a big snore; and then she was off too.

I didn't stir for a minute, for I saw that "Sammy" was up to something. He leant forward, and peered at her as if to make sure she was quite asleep; then cautiously groped in the seat beside her, and hauled up a little black bag. He opened it softly, drew out a silver-topped flask, and closed it just as a jerk of the train roused the old lady. Sammy dived back into his corner; and she sat bolt-

upright, rubbed her eyes hard, felt suspiciously about till she found the bag, stowed it away behind her, and resumed her knitting. Only for a few moments though: with a weary groan she let stocking, needles, and all go down with a run, and dropped back sounder asleep than before.

Then from Sammy's corner came a gurgle—soft and low—many times repeated, then all was quiet.

Now was my time. I began to look about, and think what I should do first. Whether I dared get up on the seat and see how the communication with the guard worked, and what would happen if I pulled it. If the train *did* stop, I could make off, or say it was Sammy. He was half-tipsy now, and people wouldn't believe him. First of all I went to the window to look out a little. It was pitch dark outside, and all I could see was the reflection of the carriage, and of the lady in the blue woollen veil. She was sitting up now, and looking intently at *me*. What an uncomfortable set they were, to be sure!

I looked round at her directly. She was very young—younger than Letty, and *she's* just seventeen, and not pretty—but so thin and frightened looking that I felt quite unhappy about her.

She fixed her big bright eyes on me, and put up her finger. "Don't speak," she said in a clear whisper. "Keep looking out of the window. Can you hear what I am saying?"

I nodded, and she went on, looking now at me, and now at the old woman.

"If they get me to London, I am a dead woman. You are my last chance. Will you help me?"

I nodded very hard indeed, and looked at the communication with the guard. She shook her head.

"No, that's no good. I must get away at the next station. *He* is safe. Can you stop *her* from following me?"

I didn't believe I could. I might have thrown a rug over Sammy, and sat on him for a minute or two; but that old woman was too much for me. I felt that directly she woke she'd see what I was thinking of, and strangle me before I could stir. The precious minutes were flying—the miles were hurrying past us in the outside gloom—the girl's big woeful eyes were fixed on me in desperate appeal.

"I have friends who will save me if I can but get to them," she panted. "Just one minute's chance—only one ——"

All at once I had an idea. A splendid one! "Look at this," I whispered, and held up my railway key. "If I open this door, dare you get out? You can hold on outside till the train stops. Run straight across the down line. There's only a bank and a hedge on the top. Lots of gaps in it nearer the station. There you are on the Luckborough Road. Do you hear?"

I was quite hot and out of breath with whispering all this as plain

as I could. She caught every word as fast as I could think it almost.

What with the feeling of my own cleverness; hatred of that nasty old woman and delight in spiting her; and pity for the poor girl, I felt as brave as any fellow, however big, could do, and full of ideas as well.

"Give me *that*," I said, pointing to her blue veil. "They won't see you're gone if I sit here, with it tied over my head."

"Oh, no! no! They'll *kill* you."

"Not they! They can't interfere with *me*." (I declare, I felt as if I could fight Sammy and a dozen old ladies just then.) "Quick! now or never." I tied the veil over my head and lowered the window as softly as possible. There was no time to lose, for the train was slackening speed even then. I unlocked the door. She gave me one look that made me feel braver than ever, and inclined to cry, both at once; and in a second she was out on the step. The train stopped. I saw her skirt flutter in the stream of light that fell from our open carriage door across the down line of rails, and that was all,—and I was huddled down under the big plaid rug with the old woman wide-awake standing over me.

"Drat the boy. Sammy! Call the porter; he's got out at the wrong side."

"Call-un-yre-self," answered Sammy, all in one word.

She pulled the door to and tramped back to her seat, taking no more notice of me than if I had been a cushion of the carriage. "It don't matter if he has broken his neck either," she muttered, "perhaps we'd better make no fuss." The train was off again. I dared not jump up while she was in the way, and thought I must take my chance at the next station.

"Oh! my bones and body!" she groaned presently. "Oh, what a time it has been! Sammy."

No answer.

"Sammy!" She was up again, and I think she hauled him up and shook him, for something fell with a crash like a broken bottle.

"You idiot," she screamed. "When you want all the brains you've got, and more too! To play me this trick! Serve you right if I get out and leave you at the next station—ugh!"

It sounded as if she were banging his head against the carriage. That and the fresh air seemed to rouse him. He got up and put his head out of the window for a short time, and then replied slowly and impressively.

"Now look here, old woman. None of your nonsense. When he's wanted, Samuel Nixon is all there. And no man alive can say he isn't," he went on solemnly, holding carefully on to one word till he was sure of the next. "As to this business, I ask you—Is it mine or is it yours? Now then?"

"Yours, I should think; as it's your wife who is giving us all this trouble. I wish I'd left you to fight it out yourselves."

"Stop that," said Sammy, who was talking himself sober and consequently savage. "I'll not have it put upon me. *I* didn't want to marry her; *that* was your doing, and *I* don't want to make away with her; *that's* your doing, and if it's a hanging matter, *I* am not the one to swing for it."

"Heaven forgive you, Sammy!" said the old woman, evidently horribly scared. "Don't ye talk in that way to your poor old mother —don't. If the poor creature was only in her right mind she'd be the first to say her old nurse was her best friend —— the only one she had in the world when her Pa died and left her."

Here she sniffed a little. Sammy gave a sort of derisive growl.

—"And as to her marrying you; it stood to reason that she must marry somebody, sometime, left all alone in the world with her good looks and her fortune; and why not my handsome son? It *was* luck for you, Sammy, though you turn against me now. There you were, just come home from foreign parts, without a halfpenny in your pocket, or a notion where to turn to find one; and there was she without a relation or friend to interfere with you—as simple as a baby—not a creature to stop her doing as she chose with herself and her money. It would have been a sin and a shame to lose such a chance! Of course, I wanted to see my handsome lad as good a gentleman as the best of them." The old woman seemed to be talking on and on purposely; like telling a rigmarole to a child to keep it quiet. Sammy growled again in a milder tone.

"Oh, yes. Say it's all my fault, do! You can talk black white when it pleases you."

"It *was* your fault, Sammy. You might have lived happy and peaceable if you'd chosen. Haven't I been down on my bended knees to beg you to let her alone when you was treating her that shameful that the whole country-side was ringing with it. You know it, and others know it. And I can tell you what, Mr. Samuel Nixon, if she'd been found dead in her bed, as I expected every morning of my life to hear, there wasn't a servant in the place that wouldn't have spoken up before the Coroner—and glad to do it. Who'd have swung for it then, I'd like to know."

The brute was mastered. I heard him shuffling his feet about uneasily; then—in a maudlin whimper: "It was drink, nothing else, and her aggravating, whining ways. Don't be hard on me, old woman; I'm sure I've given in handsome to all your plans."

"Because you couldn't help yourself—you fool. Now, you see what it is to have your poor old mother to turn to. Your wife may talk as much as she pleases now. Who'll believe her when we've got it written down by two grand London doctors that she's as mad as mad can be? Who's to mind her talk, or anyone else's? Aren't we taking her up to London just for the good of her health, to a nice safe place where she will be well looked after and kept

from getting herself and other folks into any more trouble; and then you and me will go back, Sammy, and live as happy and comfortable as you please."

"They *will* treat her like a lady—eh, mother?"

"Of course they will; a beautiful place, and the best of living. Bless you she'll be as happy as the day is long. It does you credit being so tender-hearted, Sammy. I knew you couldn't abide seeing her storming and raving as she did last night, so I just gave her a little sup of something before we started, and you see she's been sleeping like a baby ever since. And the gentleman—where she's going, you know—he gave me this bottle; and when we get to London I've just to give her a whiff of it on a handkercher, and off she goes as quiet as a lamb. No screams or tantrums *this* time; and he and his nurses will be on the look-out for us with his carriage, and before she knows it there she'll be as snug as you please."

This was awful!

What *should* I do? Were we ever going to stop? *Was* there another station before London? Should I be drugged, dragged off and made away with! I knew if they found me out it was all over with me. The pattern of the blue Shetland veil danced before my eyes—the noise of the train was as the sound of the roar of artillery in my ears. I sat up, ready for a spring and a struggle.

A jerk! Another! A stop, and the door flung open.

"Tickets, please."

I made one plunge. I flung the rug clean over the old woman, dashed my arm into Sammy's face, and tumbled headlong out, into the arms of the astonished ticket collector. I felt him clutch me, and then the ground rose up, or I went down—down—into an *unfathomable depth of blackness.*

"Hullo! old fellow. Better now?" were the first words I heard. Thompson's voice! There he was with a glass of water in his hand, stooping over me. Thompson's mother was kneeling beside me, cuddling me up against her nice soft sealskin. I was on the waiting-room sofa, and about a dozen people were all standing staring round. Thompson went and telegraphed home that I was safe, and then he and his mother took me to the house in London, where they were staying.

I can't remember much after that. I was ill for many weeks, I believe. I tried to tell people what had happened; but no one would listen. They try, even now, to make me believe I dreamt it in my illness. I've got it told now though, and every word of it is solemn truth. Besides, didn't I see and *smell* Letty burning the blue Shetland veil.

I've had no more music lessons since, that's one good thing.

The Railway Key? Oh, I left that sticking in the door. That's all.

A PASTORAL SERMON.

In the square, old-fashioned pew,
  Little lamb sedately folded—
Prayer book upside down, while you
  Whisper "Is it rightly holded?"—
    Your big eyes must understand
    Something of the far-off land.

While, with theologic heat,
  Our good vicar deftly handles
Arguments which must defeat
  Popish Rome with all her candles—
    You, unconscious little text,
    Preach a gospel more perplexed.

From the Shepherd's fold you came,
  Into our glad keeping given,
A fresh soul, a snow-white lamb,
  From the boundless plains of Heaven:
    To our keeping, out of His,
    "For of such My Kingdom is!"

We, His sheep, have grown so old
  And so weary with our roaming,
Sometimes we forget the fold
  And the promise of His coming,
    And too fain our feet to stray
    In strange pastures by the way:

Or, God help us, puffed with pride,
  We dare set ourselves so surely
On the righteous right-hand side,
  Whence we eye the goats securely—
    We, those nine-and-ninety, who
    Great temptation never knew.

Only sometimes o'er the face
  Of a little child we linger,
Half ashamed, half awed to trace
  Touch of God's Almighty finger,
    Till we drop our world-worn eyes
    At their innocent surprise.

So—the sermon's at an end,
  Sunday morning's duty finished;
Streaming out, hear friend greet friend
  Rome may hide her head diminished.
    "He *do* preach, our parson do!"—
    I have had my sermon too.

G. B. Stuart.



ROBERT BARNES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

THE ARGOSY.

SEPTEMBER, 1882.

MRS. RAVEN'S TEMPTATION.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "DR. HARDY'S MARRIAGE."

CHAPTER XXXI.

MRS. RAVEN'S WISHES.

THE next morning found no change in Mrs. Raven's determination to return at once to Ravenscourt. Mrs. Connell had exhausted reason in pleading with her to remain, and felt that she had no fresh inducements to hold forth. It was easy to declare that Mrs. Raven was wrong in feeling that she, a sick and nervous invalid, was an undesirable guest, and to urge that duty and affection made any such burdens light: but it was not easy to combat her arguments that such a sufferer was best at home—that even familiar furniture and faces might have a soothing effect on wrung and shattered nerves.

"I shall not be better at Ravenscourt probably," said Mrs. Raven to them, "but at least I shall feel nearer to Raven church vaults."

She spoke bitterly: and not with any natural yearning for reunion with the departed. It was only the grave's darkness and silence that she longed for: and she checked herself the moment the words were uttered. Such speeches were no fashion of hers.

"Shall you accompany your mother to Raven?" asked Mr. Connell, very quietly addressing Frank, as the rest of the family moved from the breakfast-table, and left the uncle and nephew sitting there alone, quite contrary to the Minister's usual habit, for he was generally the first to rise from meals.

Frank looked up from the newspaper which he was bending over, but not reading. There was a great comfort in the reflection that one, like the good minister, who had found so clear a track of duty for himself in life, and whose brow was lined with thought for others, while his eyes were soft and clear with God's inward light, knew at least, at what a strange turning he, Frank, had found himself, and that therefore he might confide to him many a wild fancy and memory which had kept him sleepless all that night.

"I ought to do so," replied Frank in a troubled voice. "But how can I, sir? How can I go back to Raven without one word of certainty about what that woman said?"

"But I thought we knew there was no truth in what she said." Mr. Connell looked straight at Frank as he made the remark, and there may have been a question in his tone and a little mild expostulation, but there was certainly a world of patient tenderness.

"Yes—but—" and Frank's eyes again nervously sought the printed sheet before him. "I must say something, uncle, as we are upon this subject. Though you probably know that Miss Evelyn Agate is a foundling, you may not know that the presumed day of her birth is the same as mine. I quite forgot it myself all along until I was showing you that scrap of paper last night."

"When and how did you first learn that fact, Frank?" quietly asked Mr. Connell, who had risen from his seat and was slowly pacing the room.

"When I first saw *her*. It was at the house of Miss Agate, whom she calls 'aunt.' Philip took me there; he knew them. The date had just appeared, with the name of a firm of lawyers, in the newspapers at that time, and Miss Agate thought it worth while to make some inquiries into the matter. Philip went to them for her first, and the two ladies went themselves."

"And what was the result?" asked Mr. Connell.

"Nothing," replied Frank. "I think Evelyn Agate was very much distressed that it was so. She seemed to have expected all sorts of important revelations."

"Did the coincidence strike you in the least at the time?" asked Mr. Connell. "Do you recollect whether you made any remark about it?"

Frank shook his head. "I had not then the faintest idea that there had been—anything wrong—about my birthday."

"You must not allow yourself to think of it as true," said the Minister, decidedly. "Let me say once for all, Frank: that your blood is that of the Ravens seems to me indisputable. I asked your aunt last night, in a casual way, which ancestor it was she had said you resembled; and she instantly answered that you are like many of the family pictures, but bear the most striking resemblance to one Gilbert Raven, whose portrait hangs over the fireplace in the Court dining-room."

"I am not in the least like Leonard," said Frank. "Everybody always remarked that."

"I have been told that Leonard favours your mother's people entirely," observed Mr. Connell.

There was a short silence. Frank, who was growing more and more disposed to think that truth must be at the bottom of the Oriental Mystery's assertions, recollected that she had declared him to be the child neither of his mother nor his father.

"There was my father's peculiar will!" Frank ventured to whisper.

"I have thought of that," said Mr. Connell. "You are wondering whether some doubt about your birth had entered his mind and prompted it. I cannot think so. There does not seem to have been the faintest trace of such a doubt; and if there had been, it would hardly have led him to do as he did. Remember, he left your mother all he could, and made you her sole heir."

"I am trusting you with everything, uncle; I am saying things which I never thought to have spoken. It is that I have often thought my mother did not seem to care for me. She was always very good, and did every duty, and gave me the best advice, and all that, but nothing seemed to come quite naturally. She never forgot me, but I think she had always to remember me."

Mr. Connell stood quite still. "But until you heard this suggestion, I don't suppose you laid much stress on these things."

Frank shook his head. "The servants used to tell me that Leonard was mamma's favourite. When I was naughty, they would say, 'And no wonder;' and when I was in favour, they made it an occasion for petting and pity. It was ever the same tune."

"Most mothers have a preference among their children," said Mr. Connell. "Your brother was a sickly child, and has always remained delicate. Our Percy had a dangerous illness in infancy, which has made him his mother's darling ever since. Such preferences generally follow infirmity or inferiority, physical, mental, or moral. It is a blessed provision of nature to secure one friend to those least likely to win many."

Frank spoke again with a great effort. "I must say it was the full realisation of my mother's feeling towards me which made me leave Ravenscourt, and throw myself on Philip's hospitality in London."

Mr. Connell made a half-deprecating wave of his hand, and said, "Is it so? Is it so?" He would not trust himself to any more definite response. Philip had certainly told his father very little about Frank and his London visit, but by many a significant glance and emphasis—especially strong after Mrs. Raven had notified her intention of coming to Coltburn—he had managed to convey something of the real state of matters.

"I feel sure my mother thought I should be better away from home," Frank explained, to do away with any harsh impression: "that she saw I ought to know something of the realities of life. I should have been brought up to a profession, as I believe was always her wish ——"

"But not your father's?"

"I suppose not. I had a sort of general idea that arrangements would be made to buy a small estate for me, which would at once secure me occupation in life, as well as a maintenance. That seemed to be the home intentions—I cannot say I really thought

much about it. It is odd how little of definite thought one gives to this kind of thing beforehand."

"Quite natural, at your age," observed Mr. Connell. "You see, your father's death occurred at a critical point of your existence. Had he lived a few years longer, he would no doubt have seen the necessity of settling matters very differently. Not that there is any real harm done, Frank: perhaps quite the reverse. You will have the satisfaction of making some way for yourself in life before you enter upon your inheritance."

"I shall first of all have to make sure that I have a right to any inheritance," spoke Frank. "If I have reason to think I am not my father's son, I will never touch a bequest—that was left by him in the belief that I was his."

Mr. Connell paused beside his nephew, and laid his hand on his shoulder. "My dear boy," he exhorted, "your immediate duty is to keep your mind from dwelling on this matter; at least, until we hear what information the police can get for us. The faintest clue as to who this woman is, where she comes from, and under what influence she works, might explain all. In the meantime, it is your direct duty to act as you would have acted if this wretched rumour had never reached you."

"What!—even to go to Ravenscourt?" asked Frank in dismay. "How can I—how can I?"

"I am by no means sure that your presence there might not be highly desirable," mused the Minister. "And whatever we ought to do, Frank, we can do. Remember that. Those are the happiest people who never forget it."

Frank thought of Alice Cleare, and the simple faith and courage with which she restrained even grief and terror. "If you think it is right, sir," he faltered.

The elder man was touched by this quick docility. Why should he bind a hard burden on the lad, which perhaps it was not meet that he should bear? "Let your mother herself decide for you, Frank," he said kindly. "Go up and speak with her. You have never asked me what became of the gold in the packet found in our vase," added Mr. Connell, with a grave smile. "I hope you do not think I regard it as treasure-trove, and intend to exercise manorial rights?"

"I—I really forgot all about it for the moment," Frank answered, looking up. "Who it was that sent it, and why it should have been sent, and to me, I cannot in the least degree imagine. Of course I shall never touch it."

"Certainly not," assented Mr. Connell. "I took charge of it, and I purpose, with your consent, to seal it up, write outside it, 'In trust for Frank Raven,' and then stow it away in my strong box. It may be well to keep the very coins which were sent, and the paper they came in."

"Yes, uncle. I cannot tell you how thankful I am to have your advice and countenance just now."

"Not more thankful than I am if I can be serviceable to you," said Mr. Connell, warmly. "Is there any person, outside your own family circle at the Court, on whom you could rely in any emergency that might call for tact and trustworthiness? We who have lived long in the world generally learn to know where one or two such friends are to be found. But you young folks would do well to reflect beforehand where you would look for such."

"There is the Vicar," said Frank, "the Rev. Jasper Toynbee. He was my father's confidential friend—in general," he added, qualifying his statement as he remembered that the Vicar had not been admitted to the Squire's confidence concerning his will. "Mr. Toynbee has always been very kind to me."

"Toynbee—Toynbee," mused Mr. Connell. "I don't remember that name in the days when I knew something of your neighbourhood."

"He was not there then," Frank answered. "He became vicar about two years before I was born."

Mr. Connell said nothing. But he made a mental note that this Rev. Jasper Toynbee was one person who might, on a future occasion, give some information as to the people and circumstances surrounding that fateful fourth of September.

"I suppose I had better go to my mother at once," observed Frank.

"Do so," said his uncle, drawing the newspaper to his side of the table.

Frank met Evelyn on the staircase, coming down from his mother's chamber. She had breakfasted there with Mrs. Raven, and so apparently had had no opportunity for uninterrupted perusal of her morning's letters. For she had one open in her hand, and was smiling as she glanced through it. She quickly held it down by her side as she greeted Frank.

"Have you heard from Miss Agate?" he asked. "She ought to be in the country in this beautiful weather. I hope she is quite well."

"I hope so, too," said Evelyn, with a light laugh. "I have not heard from her."

And so they passed on their way, and Evelyn's image in Frank's mind returned to its dark corner. From whom had she received that letter, and why did she want to hide it?

Mrs. Raven, who had not brought her maid to Coltburn, was moving about, surrounded by luggage-labels, straps, and other paraphernalia of departure. She meant to go, and to go that day. It was the first time since her indisposition of the previous day, that Frank had seen her out of bed, and attired in her ordinary costume. He was struck by a singular change in her—a change not to be accounted for by a day or two's sickness, and that sickness not acute. She looked like one who has had a terrible shock. Frank remembered in his boyhood having seen a lady, of whom he was told a tale.

Going to awaken an only brother, from whom she had parted in anger the night before, she found him in his bed dead. He had never forgotten that lady's face; he could understand the expression it wore. But why did his mother's remind him of it now? Suffering enough, she had had, it was true, but none of it was of the nature of a shock. Could it be that the alarm in the night, falling upon strained nerves and a weakened constitution, had had all this effect.

She moved towards him feebly, and put up her face to his. He understood the gesture, and kissed her. It was no customary action between them. And Frank did it with a certain formal solemnity.

"Come and sit down beside me," she said. "I want to see a little of you before I go away."

"I would have been with you more yesterday, only that I was afraid I might disturb you," observed compunctious Frank.

"When one has an awful headache, anything disturbs one," she answered; "but you don't disturb me now, at any rate."

Her eyes seemed searching his face, as if she expected to see something there that she did not find. The thought which had occurred to Leonard occurred also to Frank: Mrs. Raven was surely very much shaken by his father's death, and it was telling on her.

"Do you really think you are fit to travel?" he asked, tenderly.

"Quite," she said. "I think travelling does me good. I felt better while I was on my way to Coltburn than I had felt for a long while before. But I have been worse since I came here."

"You have been here so short a while, mother! You have not given the change a fair chance. I shall accompany you, of course: you would wish it."

"No," she said, quickly; "no, no. I will not shorten your visit. Stay you in this happy house, among these good, kind people."

"But my visit must be short, anyhow," answered Frank. "When Philip returns to London, I shall not remain behind him."

"Go back to London with him, then," urged Mrs. Raven. "I am sure the little change has been good for you. There will be plenty of time for the Court by-and-bye."

"Not if you would like me to be there, mother," returned Frank, softly. "Do you not?"

Something like a spasm passed over her pale face. "Of course, I like you to be there," she said. "But love is not selfish, Frank. I like you to be where I feel it is good for you to be."

She was her old, didactic self as she spoke, and she spoke in her old chilling manner. Frank felt a painful doubt as to which was her true self—the strange, pleasant change, or the sudden reaction.

"Go back to London," she continued more genially, touching his arm with the tips of her thin fingers. "Go back, and write to me about all you do, and all you see. And do not forget to go often to Miss Agate's house."

Frank looked up at her. Her eyes did not meet his.

"I have heard so much of her from Evelyn," Mrs. Raven went on, nervously. "I think she must be so very good a woman: and she has suffered a great deal! You have never seen her poor brother—have you?"

"Oh, no," answered Frank. "Even Miss Evelyn Agate has never seen him."

"So she tells me. His state of health is a terrible trial. Did you ever hear of any medical opinion about it?"

"No," replied Frank, rather wondering. His mother did not often manifest an interest in utter strangers. "But he is not considered insane now; he suffers only from the effects of the shock he received."

Mrs. Raven gave a slight shiver. "I cannot help thinking he must have allowed some secret trouble to prey upon his mind until it unhinged it."

"Probably," answered Frank. "But how did you hear so much about him, mother?"

"Oh, Miss Evelyn Agate has talked to me," answered Mrs. Raven, quickly. "Poor man! Should you get to hear of anything that could serve him in any way, Frank—involving any little expense, you understand, let me know of it. It is not much one can do for those thus stricken—but let us do it."

She rose. And Frank rose too. She took both his hands in hers.

"Good-bye, Frank—I will say it to you here—good-bye for the present. God bless you! And remember—remember always—that wherever I am, at Ravenscourt or anywhere else, there is a home for you."

She had yet a few whispered questions to put about money matters. But Frank had not exhausted his own store, and would take nothing from her.

Thus almost as soon, so to say, as Mrs. Raven entered the house at Coltburn, she left it again, Evelyn Agate of course accompanying her. There was something in this sudden departure that the Connells, straightforward and open always in action themselves, could not understand.

"My belief is, she got such a scare the other night with that scream, that she's afraid to stay," spoke Percy, ready as usual with his opinion. "Thinks we keep ghosts in the house—or something as bad."

When they had left, Mrs. Connell was admitted to the secret of the young people's visit to the witch, and of the strange thing found in the drawing-room. And it turned out that she had very valuable testimony to give concerning the blue-rimmed flower-vase.

"The packet was not there the morning after our fright in the night; I can say so positively," affirmed Mrs. Connell. "But that this is certain, I might feel inclined to believe that the figure we saw

on the lawn did somehow get into the house, and put the strange packet beneath the plant."

"And then fastened the bolt inside the window, after he went out," Philip reminded her, with a laugh.

His mother took no notice of this interruption. "On the night of the scream—of course, I mean previous to it, when we were all in the drawing-room—during the evening I happened to strike my arm against the card-table, nearly threw it down, in fact, and heard one of the red pots rattle as if it were broken. I looked, and saw that it was broken: Julia, it seems, had done it that same morning when lifting it out to dust the vase. She told Minton of it, but there had been no time to say anything to me, engaged as I was with Mrs. Raven. The following morning, after breakfast, when you were all busy in the dining-room talking about the scream, I got a fresh pot from the garden, carried it to the drawing-room, and myself put the geranium into it, giving the broken pieces of the other pot to Julia to take away. Certainly the packet of gold was not there then."

"And you are sure it was the same flower-pot, Milicent—not the other?"

"I am sure it was the same in which you tell me the gold was found," Mrs. Connell replied to her husband's question. "It was the scarlet plant, and it was in the blue-rimmed vase. I did not touch the other."

"Pretty conclusive evidence, mother, I think," remarked Philip. "This you say was after breakfast on the morning following the fright. The windows were kept bolted that day ——"

"I saw to that," interrupted his mother. "I had been too much scared myself not to take care of the window fastenings."

"Just so, mother. Therefore, putting aside any idea of supernatural agency, as I presume we all do, it must be somebody living within the house who placed the packet where it was found."

The Minister smiled. "For a rising special pleader, Philip, your argument is rather a lame one. How do you know it was not placed there by a visitor?"

Philip lifted his eyebrows. "Could a visitor be left alone long enough to take out a plant from a pot, mould and all, and put it in again, sir?"

Of course that was a question. Mr. Connell could not answer it. Alice Cleare, who was standing with them, spoke.

"Would not the fact of Mrs. Connell's having recently lifted the same flower and the mould out of one pot and put it into another, render the task more easy?"

"Undoubtedly it would," said Mrs. Connell. "And the mould was caked quite stiff to the shape of the pot, so that with care it would not be disturbed, or crumble."

"Well now, what visitors had you that day," asked the Minister.

"Miss Beck and Miss Miranda for two," laughed Philip. "Can't

say, though, that I should suspect those estimable gentlewomen of trying their hands at a conjuring trick."

Mrs. Connell laughed too. "No, indeed. And we had scarcely any other visitors that day. Not one, I think, who was in the drawing-room alone."

"Marco Learli came in, you know, when we were at dinner, mother, and you would not let me go to him," cried Percy.

"But Louisa went," said Mrs. Connell.

"As if Marco Learli would put a packet of gold in the flower-pot!" struck in Louisa, her colour heightening.

"I did not say he would," retorted Percy. "I don't fancy he has any too much gold for himself."

"Hush, children," interposed their mother. "Poor Marco Learli may, I am sure, be exempt from suspicion. And so may every visitor—they were but few, I repeat—that called that day."

"Well, it seems we can make nothing of it ourselves, so we must carry this additional fact to the detectives," said the Minister. "Frank," he added, turning to his nephew, "have you written to question your brother Leonard about the ring?—When he lost it—if he knows, and where he kept it?"

Frank had the ring on his finger, and before he answered he held out his hand and looked at it, as if he half thought it might be spirited back to its accustomed place at the Court.

"No," he said. "I will not be in a hurry. I think, uncle, I should not like to ask Leonard to keep anything secret from my mother—from Mrs. Raven. And we should not like a worry of this unaccountable sort to be told her as soon as she reaches home."

Philip Connell was quick enough to notice how Frank substituted the title "Mrs. Raven" for the words "my mother." But the only impression it conveyed to him was, that the alienation between mother and son was steadily increasing.

"Perhaps you are right, Frank—looking at it from that point of view," said the Minister.

CHAPTER XXXII.

VOICES.

Mrs. Raven felt rather surprised to see how glad Evelyn Agate appeared to be at returning to Ravenscourt. She had expected a little youthful disinclination to exchange a circle of bright young faces, and all the full and happy life of the Minister's house, for a monotonous dull solitude at the Court.

Yet, truly, how beautiful it was! Mrs. Raven could not help saying so aloud, as the carriage drove slowly up the avenue. The solemnity of late autumn slept upon the scene. The beauty might be that of decay, but it was rich and pathetic beauty.

It was at this time of year that Mrs. Raven had entered the Court as a bride. The trees were clad in crimson and amber, just as they had been that day. She would have liked to speak of it. She glanced at Evelyn. The girl sat beside her, with lips half parted in a smile. Evelyn had her own thoughts, and they were evidently pleasant enough; but they were not of the peaceful glory stretching around her: she did not seem to see it. Mrs. Raven sighed and relapsed into silence.

But Miss Evelyn Agate was quite on the alert when the carriage drew up at the hall door. Her short return to the simplicities of such a house as the Connells' had made her more than ever appreciative of the charm of spacious and lofty chambers, of velvet carpets, and all the thousand "appliances" of wealth and luxury. She liked, too, to see the crowd of servants: and she did not, for the moment, miss Leonard.

"The Squire has gone into the town to a committee meeting, madam," explained Budd, the butler. "He said he could hardly be home before you got here, but he should not be long after you."

"Very well," said Mrs. Raven. "I suppose tea is ready for us. Charity, I shall need no help but yours. Mackay you can attend to the trunks, and see if Miss Agate needs anything."

The first question Mrs. Raven put to the old servant was about Leonard: had he been quite well during her short absence?

"Much as usual, madam," answered Charity. "I must make bold to ask after Master Frank? I hoped to see him back with you to-day."

"He is quite well—very well, indeed," replied Mrs. Raven kindly. "He is going back to London for a little while, but I think we shall see him here very soon."

"Only the bad weather will be on us soon," observed Charity. "If he doesn't come very quickly, he'll come back to bare boughs. He is sorely wanted, madam; the house will never be the same till Master Frank's back in it."

"I daresay you were told by Mr. Leonard, Charity, that I came back so soon because I was ill: I dropped him a line to say so. And have you anything to tell me? Have there been changes here of any sort?"

Charity shook her head. "Nothing of any account," she answered. "We have had no more tales, making believe to see that ghost; though maybe that's because nobody will go through the lanes at nightfall now. And I've made bold to get my bed-room changed, madam. I did that only two days ago, begging pardon for not asking your leave first. Mrs. Sims didn't think you'd mind."

"Not if it suits you better, Charity. But what was amiss with your own? You have been in that room for more than twenty years."

It was a small room or closet, off the corridor on which Mrs.

Raven's own apartments opened. Charity's confidential position, as half nurse, half maid, had made this personal proximity a very convenient arrangement years ago.

"Aye," said Charity, "I slept there first when you were expecting Master Frank, madam."

Mrs. Raven shivered.

"A nice little room it is, too," pursued Charity, "and I liked it. Every way handier than the attic I've gone to. But a bed-room's made for sleeping in, madam, as you know. And I was going off my sleep there; and that does not do for an old woman."

"But why?" said Mrs. Raven.

"I was disturbed there," said Charity.

"What could disturb you now after all these years?"

Charity laughed. "The wind, madam;" she said, "it's a way it blows sometimes—and then not for years again, it seems. It's like the cry of a child. I heard it when I was first in that room all those years ago. But my nerves were strong then, and I had plenty of work to do. I heard it again just after Miss Evelyn came to the Court; I daresay she'll remember I told her about it. And three or four days ago I heard it two nights running, nearly all the night. And the house seemed so odd and eerie like, and there seemed to be more folks about it than one could see. And I wasn't going to give way to such fancies, knowing well with my reason that it was only the wind. So I changed the room.——I suppose you have never noticed this wind, madam?"

"Never," said Mrs. Raven. "Have many visitors called?"

"No," said Charity. "Mr. Brackenbury has been here once or twice. And Lord Weald's eldest son, who is up at their place just now, called and left his card; the master was out that day. And the Vicar came once to dinner."

"And nothing has happened in the village?"

"Nothing, except that Eldred Sloam has hurt his leg. He hadn't been seen for a few days—not that anybody missed him—till it came out this morning that he was lying sick in his cottage."

"Who is taking care of him?" asked Mrs. Raven.

"Nobody," said Charity. "The like of him is nothing to anybody, madam. And it's well known the master is against him; always was. Sims gave James one or two little things, beef-tea, or that, to take home to his father; and the boy is to sleep at home to-night; but there's no woman folk about."

"I'm afraid the poor man has not deserved much kindness from women's hands, Charity."

Charity gave a low laugh. "It isn't those that deserve best that get most, from mothers, wives, or friends. I'll be glad to go and see him, if you'll let me, madam."

"Yes, Charity, go, and take for him what you think best. And now send tea up to my boudoir."

Leonard came in, tired and fretful, from his committee-meeting. He was vexed to find his mother back home so soon, especially as she was looking not better for her change, but worse; and he foresaw trouble for himself. And Leonard had a strong objection to all trouble except of his own manufacture, of which he always kept a plentiful supply.

He chose to take his tea standing on the hearth-rug, cup in hand. He made a few careless inquiries about the Connells—"Frank's new friends," he called them now, as if they had not the most remote connection with himself. Then he told Mrs. Raven that the Fishers, of the White Hart, were wanting to break their old lease, and renew it on new terms, which he was quite determined not to agree to. He grumbled over Eldred Sloam's accident; he believed the man had been poaching when it occurred—and now he supposed it would end in his coming on the parish. *He* was not going to continue that ridiculous allowance to him: such a character ought to have been moved off the land years ago. All of which grated on Mrs. Raven.

"And what is this nonsense about a strange figure walking again up and down the Raven lanes?" asked Leonard. "I suppose you have heard of it—since Frank wrote to me about it while you and he were together. I am at a loss to imagine how he could trouble himself or me over such stuff."

"Frank feared it might be some undesirable character, I suppose," observed his mother, as she set down her cup and saucer. Her hand was shaking so that the spoon rattled in the china.

"Who is it in the Connells' house that had seen it here?" he asked. "It's a queer thing anybody should have gone from this place to that. A nursery-maid, did Frank say?"

"The governess—a very pleasant young lady," answered Mrs. Raven, patiently. "She stayed one night here, at the White Hart; and was, I believe, returning from Gerstowe to the inn, when she saw it."

Ought she to tell her son what had happened at Coltburn? He was certainly in no encouraging mood. But it might be wisest and best.

Leonard gave a slight laugh as he listened. "Oh, the figure appeared there in the character of a would-be burglar, did it? It has a ghostly reputation here. It is whispered that it was the cause of Sloam's accident ——"

"Of Sloam's accident!" exclaimed Mrs. Raven.

"By causing him to try to leap a fence to avoid passing it, or something of that sort. Of course the plain truth is, he was tipsy. Mr. Toynbee is very much annoyed about it altogether. Worsfold seems somehow to have become an authority on the subject, and all the men in the place spend their evenings in his tap-room talking it over. I told Toynbee that I thought it was within the compass of his spiritual duty to go out, with book and bell, and exorcise the

ghost. He said he couldn't exorcise what he didn't believe in. By the way, mother," Leonard added, with a change to a pleasanter tone, "the Vicar seems very much interested in your lady-companion. He fancies he has seen her before, or somebody so like her that it must be a relative."

Leonard looked at his mother. She did not speak.

"Toynbee thinks she or her people may have had Ravenstoke connections in years gone by. I told him I believed not: that she belonged to London entirely, was an orphan, and brought up by an aunt. I don't know how I remembered so much as that; but it's right, isn't it?"

"It will do very well," answered Mrs. Raven.

"You will be the better for a rest after your journey," said Leonard, who wanted to be set free, that he might get to his accounts and memoranda, among which he usually passed his evenings.

Mrs. Raven assented drearily, and as Leonard left her boudoir by the one door, she went by the other into her bed-room.

As she was passing her window there, she started, and stood still. The scene was almost lovelier than it had been earlier in the afternoon, for now the calm sky was broken up into masses of ruddy gold, flaming in the west, and in the east gleaming amid warm violet shadows. But it was not the beauty of the sky which fixed Mrs. Raven's attention, and arrested her where she stood.

It was a sound of voices borne in by the rising breeze. The window, which was open, overlooked an undulating meadow intersected by a narrow path, the shortest route from the Court to the upper end of the village, avoiding the avenue and the lodge gate, and being the path to the warren.

There were two people in sight in the golden dusk, walking rapidly away from the Court. They were talking as they went. And one laughed. One of them was a short, bent old woman, who carried a basket covered with a white cloth. The other was a tall, slim girl, with a cloud-like shawl flung round her shoulders, and a white garden hat on her head. Mrs. Raven knew who they were, and she knew where they were going.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WHAT DID THE VICAR SEE?

On this evening of Evelyn Agate's return to the Court, she found herself full of that restless energy we often feel when we get back to familiar scenes after an absence. She wandered out upon the hall steps, and looked this way and that, just as people may do who expect to see somebody that will be visible by and bye. A triumphant spring lay in her gait, a vivid touch of colour on her cheeks,

which usually lacked it. It was no wonder that Charity, coming out behind her, noticed this.

"*You* are the better for your visit, young madam, if the mistress is not."

"Where are you going?" Evelyn asked, lightly raising the white cloth which covered the basket that Charity carried.

"To see a sick man," replied Charity. "If you were like Lord Weald's daughters you'd come with me. The gentry know that's the way to keep poor folks in heart."

Now Evelyn had no philanthropic instincts. She hated poverty in small homes and close rooms: she had no pity for the little troubles which make life weary to common people. And of infection she had a positive terror. But she would sacrifice a great deal to be like Lord Weald's daughters, or rather to seem like them.

"What is the matter with the man?" she asked. "Is it anything catching?"

"It's a bruised leg—but it's rather bad," answered Charity.

"Has he a grumbling wife and a dozen little pigs of children?" inquired Miss Evelyn.

Charity laughed; her old, scornful laugh. "It is Eldred Sloam," she said; "the page's father."

"Oh, yes, Eldred Sloam; I have heard his name before: a queer character, I believe. If you'll wait while I get my hat and shawl, I'll come with you, Charity. I daresay he'll be rather interesting."

Charity opened her mouth, perhaps to object, but closed it again. She waited while Evelyn ran in-doors.

"The mistress didn't tell me much about Master Frank," began the old woman, as they walked along. "How is he? I wonder he didn't want to come home?"

"I expect he'll come soon," replied Evelyn. "And I daresay he'll stay long enough when he does come."

"And is Miss Connell very nice and pretty?" asked Charity, artfully, with a sidelong glance at her companion.

"Miss Connell!" echoed Evelyn, who felt as if she had nearly forgotten Louisa's existence. "Oh, she is nice enough. A weak sort of girl."

"It will be only natural for the mistress to be pleased if she and Master Frank take to each other," remarked Charity.

Evelyn stood still with astonishment. Had Charity got this idea from her mistress? "I never heard of it," she cried. "I saw nothing to lead to such a notion. Miss Connell is in love with somebody else, poor silly girl: and as for Mr. Frank, at present he has eyes for nobody except his aunt's governess."

"Oh, that doesn't matter," remarked Charity. "Young men's love affairs are like children's teeth: the first that come are only meant to go."

"Ah, but this is quite a delightful romance," cried Evelyn, glad

of a sympathetic ear to which to impart the bitterness towards Alice, hitherto kept latent in her own heart. "When they met this time at Coltburn, it was with recognition. The sweet young person, who is nevertheless a pearl of wisdom and propriety, had been strolling about the Raven lanes at midnight some time back, and meeting Mr. Frank, had claimed his protection against that mysterious twilight pedestrian whom, if you remember, you once told me about."

"Then that's the girl who asked the questions at the White Hart!" exclaimed Charity. "And so she went off to live with the Connells, did she? That's not accident; no, no. Something lies at the bottom of all things that happen in that curious way. What's her name, please?"

"Alice Cleare."

"Alice Cleare!" repeated the old woman to herself, as if trying whether she could recall the name. But she said no more, for they were near Sloam's cottage.

It was one of those dwellings so familiar to all who know the deep green lanes and sunny dells of the southern English counties. The low palings of its front garden stood back from the road, and the garden sloped downwards to the house, whose low walls were so covered with creepers—now in their deepest shade of crimson—and its heavy-eaved roof so rich in moss, that the building itself seemed to belong to Nature almost as much as the bracken-clad bank which rose green behind it. A few borders, some flower-beds, and such-like charming touches, would have made the whole a picture for a poet's admiration. But Eldred Sloam did not trouble himself with these things. As the visitors drew near, they heard a voice speaking to him in a tone of exhortation, not untouched by pity.

"It is the Vicar!" whispered Charity. But she walked straight in, and Mr. Toynbee rose at once and welcomed her, before he noticed that she was accompanied by anyone. For the good man was always glad to testify his respect for the character which Charity bore—that of a faithful and long-attached servant. He did not like the woman, and was sorry she was not a living recommendation of her manifold virtues. But he could not help that.

"I am glad to see you, Mrs. Hale," he said, "our poor friend is suffering much! And this is kind of you, Miss Agate!"

"Well," said Charity, approaching the sick man, "I always told you what would come of your drinking, Eldred."

"Other folks hurt their legs as well as I," growled a voice from the bed, "even teetotallers. I never did it before."

"How was it?" asked Charity. "You got a fright, didn't you?"

Mr. Toynbee interposed. "I have been speaking to Eldred about that," he said. "And have, I think, arrived at the truth. Eldred frightened himself."

"What did you think you saw, my man?" cried Charity, in a half-coaxing, half-mocking tone.

"You would have thought it something queer had you seen it yourself," retorted the sick man.

"It was a wheelbarrow, drawn out from the shed in Ash Lane, and standing on its end with the shafts in the air," explained Mr. Toynbee. "As Eldred came along, he saw, not it, but its shadow in the moonlight, and it looked to have a very strange appearance: and he, not being quite so sober as he should have been, tried to leap the hedge. That's how it was, Mrs. Hale."

Charity gave a slighting laugh. "If you took it for old Nick, Eldred, begging the Vicar's pardon, did you think the leaping over a hedge could save you? What did you fancy it was?"

"What I had seen before, and didn't want to see again," answered Eldred, tossing in his bed. "When you have been startled by a ghost once, it is but natural to think you may see it a second time."

"You never saw any ghost, Sloam," expostulated the Vicar.

"They say it's the old Squire himself that walks," persisted the invalid. "I have seen it in the lanes—yes, I have. He has walked at times, I can say that; and if he is walking again now, take my word for it that it is for no good—there's trouble ahead."

Mr. Toynbee could strenuously deny the possibility of Squire Eldred's reappearance on the scenes of his earthly life, but he certainly could plead no good as to his character when alive, or his present intentions; so he was discreetly silent.

"If he is to walk, I know who else ought to walk too," said Eldred; "and that's *she*. She might have a word to say as well as he, I reckon. But the quality get everything their own way, even to 'walking,' I suppose."

"My poor man," urged the Vicar, "you should not indulge in such thoughts as these. You have only one enemy whom you should hate, and I fear you see too many excuses for him. He is yourself."

"You don't know much about it, Vicar," moaned the sick man. "You don't know how it feels to be in the world with a black slur against your name: and the sight of what might have been yours, but for wrongs and wrongs, always before your eyes."

"I know it is hard," confessed Mr. Toynbee, "but listen, Eldred: other men, born and bred like you, have refused to be injured by the same wrongs. They have turned evil into good, and lived to be esteemed and respected. Are there no ghosts in your own heart, far, far more terrible than this fancied ghost of old Squire Eldred?"

Evelyn had sat down on a chair behind Charity. The dusty windows let in little light at best, and now that the sun was down, the low room would have been almost dark, only that the eyes of those within it had grown accustomed to its obscurity. She had taken her hat off, and now rose softly and looked at the sick man.

Certainly she did not anticipate what happened. Eldred Sloam started up in bed; his wild, white figure gleaming in the gloom around him. A lingering ray of light fell on his tangled masses of

dusky, dark red hair, and illumined his handsome countenance, now distorted with fear.

He flung out his arms. "What has she come for?" he shrieked. "I did not kill her—though you all looked at me then as if you thought I did. Take her away! Take her away! Let her stay away now, after all these years. She ran away from me as she did from the rest of you; I never knew where, never knew: I told you so then. No, no, I never killed her. I may have been bad in some ways, but never as bad as that."

That he was desperately frightened was plain to be seen. Mr. Toynbee wondered whether the man's drinking habits had induced a fit of delirium. He whispered the question to Charity.

"I think not," she answered. "I never heard that he was attacked like that. But I suppose it is sure to happen in time."

"You see his imagination draped that wheelbarrow, or its shadow, with a fantastic dreadfulness."

"Ay, but he was in drink then; he is sober now. Any way, it is all the outcome of Squire Eldred's ill deeds," added Charity, with asperity, as she set herself to the task of soothing the terror, bending over the sick-bed with a tenderness that the Vicar had not thought it was in the power of the hard old woman to show.

"Look here, Eldred," he said, cheerily, when quiet had supervened: "you must dwell on the brighter side of things, my man. We will get a nice nurse for you, and she'll rub up your house, and put matters straight and tidy. You'll live comfortably yet, if you choose."

Eldred moaned.

"I see your son James yonder, coming along," resumed the Vicar, glancing through the window. "Remember what a good and dutiful boy he is. Had you been the best of fathers, you could not have had a better son. If we lose some of what we think are our rights, I'm sure we all get many blessings. And here's this kind young lady come from the Court with Charity, just to see what you may want, and what can be done for you. Don't you mean to thank her?"

He drew Evelyn gently forward as he spoke, fully believing his own view of things—that she had come out of pure benevolence.

Eldred Sloam raised his head, and peered at her. Evelyn started back. What a wild, rough, passion-torn face it was just then—like something which had haunted the troubled dreams of a fever she had had in childhood. Whatever else Eldred Sloam saw, he saw no pity, no womanly relenting in her averted eyes and repellant mouth. With a groan, he hid his face in his poor hot pillow, and drew the tumbled bed-clothes over it.

But the Vicar had seen the two faces as they each gazed at the other.

James Sloam came in. Charity lifted from her basket the food and comforts which she had brought. She could do no more that night, but she promised to be there again in the morning, and she bade James

not to leave his father until then. Saying good-night, she went out with Evelyn.

The Vicar stole close to Eldred Sloam's bedside. He neither moved nor spoke, though Mr. Toynbee softly called his name once, twice, thrice. The pastor's heart ached for this lost sheep of his flock. "There is always forgiveness with God," he said, gently. For now he could guess what distressful recollections had newly rushed upon that poor half-maddened brain and smote that hardened heart. "Always forgiveness and comfort to be found with the ever-merciful God!"

"What an awful man!" exclaimed Evelyn, drawing a long breath, as she picked her way among the trailing weeds of the neglected garden. "And how difficult it is to believe," she added, for she knew what general gossip said of Eldred's birth, "that he, with his matted hair and rough hands, can have the most remote connection with a good family like the Ravens. Compare him with the perfect Mr. Leonard!"

"Mr. Leonard's face can't be compared with *his*," said Charity, grimly. "Put them together, and see. Or his figure either."

"Well, it is good of the Ravens to be kind to a man whose very existence must bring painful thoughts to them."

Charity's face was darkening at her words. "Aye," she said, bitterly, in response to the girl, "a drop of kindred blood will do about as much for you as years of faithful service; and everybody knows *that's* no inheritance. But there are some people, all cockered up now with pride and vanity, who may not be any better born than Eldred Sloam."

Mr. Toynbee walked away from Sloam's cottage slowly and thoughtfully, glancing before him at the swiftly receding figures of Charity and Evelyn on their road to the Court. In the Rembrandt-like lights and shadows of Sloam's low, gloomy room, the Rev. Jasper Toynbee had had a revelation. He knew now why Evelyn Agate's face had been familiar to him.

The next morning a strange whisper was going round among the Court servants. This time again it was wafted to them from the Pitch-fork. Worsfold, cutting across the fields after midnight—(he had been to Sloam's cottage, he said, but what had been his business there he did not add)—had seen two figures walking slowly in Ash Lane. Who of flesh and blood would walk slowly there, at that hour? Worsfold had looked long enough to see that the figures were those of a man and a woman—the woman in a light green print dress and white cap, like the Court domestics wore before they went into mourning. Surely they had all been safely housed, thought Mrs. Sims, looking round upon them rather suspiciously. Surely they had not been getting out their finery!

"The man wasn't the big figure that we've all either seen or heard on," was Worsfold's testimony; "he was young and slender. It's a queer business altogether. Eldred himself was raving-like, last night;

saying there was a dead woman had once lived in that there cottage of his who had as good right to 'walk' as the old Squire—mayhap better. If it had been the big figure and a woman with him, I'd have thought Eldred's words were come to pass."

Sims had her reflections on this narrative. "Salome Hale used to wear a green print gown," she said. "I've seen pieces of it made up in old Dame Sloam's patchwork quilt: I dare say there's bits of that still lying about in the drawers in Eldred's cottage. Now, who could it have been in that lane?"

"Are you thinking it might be Salome herself come back again, ma'am?" cried a curious housemaid.

"I didn't say so," said Mrs. Sims, sharply. "I need all my thoughts for my own business, and so do you, I reckon."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN ANONYMOUS LETTER.

THE first departure from any gathering leaves behind it a sense of its impending end. So, with the going away of Mrs. Raven and Evelyn, the Connell household became aware that it was speedily to contract to its ordinary dimensions.

Philip's visits among the neighbours began to take on a farewell tone, and all plans were made under the constant sense of "what we ought to do before we go away."

Philip himself was beginning to feel a strong sense that no man has a right to be happy except at the post of duty. It was a statement which poor Mrs. Connell did not attempt to gainsay; only, not being a Spartan mother, she dropped a tear upon it.

As for Frank, during those fleeting days, he lived an enchanted life. What mattered the darkness gathering round him, when it only served to set off the first sweet rays of that heavenly light which we call love?

The good minister thought that the young man was very bright and brave in all his perplexities. Neither he nor Mrs. Connell suspected the sudden comfort he had found in a new born love: and if they had, it might have seemed to be only an additional aggravation of his position. Not to them, perhaps; for they were both romantic beyond the romance of youth, as middle-aged people always are if they are so blessed as to retain any romance at all. Only Philip understood the new light on Frank's face, the fresh animation in his voice, the vivid energy and colour of his thoughts.

Philip wagged his head knowingly (knowing how little!) and made comments to himself.

"Frank has found fairy gold as well as fifty pounds. Well, well, he can afford to look for that sort of thing, for of course he'll be rich enough some day. Madam Raven can't keep him out of his fortune

in the end. 'Bread-and-cheese and kisses' are very nice for lunch, when there's sure to be a good dinner in due time. But I'll bet a hundred pounds (that's quite safe as I haven't got it) that this was no part of the Oriental Mystery's prophecy! And wouldn't mother be vexed if she suspected it! Not that she'd not think Miss Cleare quite good enough for Frank, but it would trouble her that it should have happened here, as if we, the mésalliance establishment, had encouraged another mésalliance! Why shouldn't we? Noblesse oblige! For my own part, I can't think what Aunt Raven can be thinking of, to have a young lady companion—a palpable risk to two unmarried sons! Perhaps that's why she doesn't want Frank at home. I think he could be trusted in that quarter. So could I. Yes I could, even if Miss Evelyn had a million of money. A million? Well, draw it mild, say ten thousand pounds, or any other trifling sum that wouldn't divide into a decent competency for each to live on at a different side of the world! A million would split so nicely—I might do even this on a million. She's not a lady, isn't Miss Evelyn; her very soul is vulgar, and it shows through her beauty, like a coarse factory girl in a Court dress! I wonder, sometimes, if that shriek in the night may not have been some hanky-panky trick of hers? Had it been she, instead of Alice Cleare, who went to that window in the nick of time to see that bothersome being in the garden, I might have said she was at the bottom of the whole affair."

Such were Philip's reflections, as he went out on some matter of his own the afternoon of the day previous to his and Frank's departure for London. He left the house very still. Percy was closeted in the library, doing some copying for his father. The Minister himself was away among his poor, and would probably look in upon the detectives before his return. Louisa was in her own room lying down, for she was so unmistakeably unwell, that it had become fruitless to struggle against the symptoms of indisposition. The little girls were at their books. Frank was wandering about, looking for his aunt or Alice Cleare.

New-born love was wide awake now. Its sweet dreamy infancy was over. The pain of parting had aroused it.

Frank had never played at being in love, so that he had not to pay that terrible penalty of doubt in the significance and permanence of his own feelings which always follows that dangerous pastime. If he had been the rich man's son he had once dreamed himself, or if he had been a working man with a trade in his hand, he would have gone straight to Alice Cleare, and laid his fate in her decision.

But could he dare approach with words of love the child of any well-guarded house, the daughter of any shrewd and watchful father, while he had no settled present, no hopeful future, and had reasons to doubt whether he had even a name? Frank's small knowledge of the world sufficed to answer that question in the negative.

Therefore, could he presume on Alice's orphaned loneliness, or on the impulses of a warm, womanly heart, which might only see in his disadvantages stronger pleas for his suit?

"No," said Frank to himself, "no; a thousand times no."

Was he right, or was he wrong? For there is nothing in this world better than pure and honest love. Therefore why should Alice, because her life had been deprived of so much, go deprived of this also? But there are some mistakes which the noblest natures make most readily.

"I am sure she likes me," said poor Frank to himself. "She likes me well enough to be friends with me; to feel it pleasant even to know that I like her. If I get a chance later, I don't think it will make her angry. But I have made up my mind that, before I leave her now, I shall tell her the doubt about my birth. I should not like her to hear that rumour from anybody but myself."

So, going in search of her, he stepped out into the garden, where she might be. He walked along the path in front of the house and turned its corner. There was very little garden at the back, only a grassy slope, and a clump of trees, few of which had attained their full size.

On the grass, standing on the dry leaves already lying thickly round the largest oak-tree, were Mrs. Connell and Alice Cleare. Mrs. Connell was enveloped in a large shawl, thrown over her head. They were talking earnestly, and Alice had a sheet of paper in her hand, which she looked at, as if it was the subject under consideration. They both heard Frank's footsteps and turned towards him.

"We are very glad to see you," said his aunt. "We have something here, Frank, which we think you ought to see."

"It came by this afternoon's post," added Alice, handing him the paper, and looking anxiously at him as she did so.

"And Miss Cleare very sensibly brought it straight here to me," observed Mrs. Connell; who, by the signs of her basket, had been searching for pretty faded leaves for household decoration.

"It seems half a disgrace to have to talk over such matters," added Alice, in a low voice. She had handed Frank an envelope and a folded half-sheet of paper. The few words upon it were written in the same mysterious caligraphy with which Frank was already familiar. They ran as follows:

"Let those who, not being of Raven blood, see the Raven ghost, beware of all who bear the Raven name."

Frank turned over the envelope. Its superscription was in the same handwriting. It bore the post-mark of "Gerstowe."

"You remember I was coming from Gerstowe the night I met it," whispered Alice. "It is where my brother died—where he lies buried."

"My dear, I think you are both brave and good not to get frightened over this," said Mrs. Connell, approvingly. She was pleased

with Alice's confidence in her. This girl evidently knew what was the right thing to do, and did it.

Frank lost himself in thought. He was recalling Evelyn's laughing face as she had come downstairs on the morning of her departure, the letter, she had not chosen to speak about, in her hand. Could that letter have been a missive similar to this?—except probably of exactly opposite purport? If so, then at least it would seem that Evelyn could have no complicity in the plot, whatever it might be.

"We must tell my husband of this when he comes home," said Mrs. Connell, gathering up her fragile treasures and preparing to move towards the house. "It may be best for all of us who are cognizant of this matter to be perfectly frank with each other. One never knows at what tiny point the clue to a chain of evidence may begin."

"May I keep this paper, Miss Cleare?" Frank asked, in a low voice as they followed the elder lady along the garden path.

"Certainly you may," she replied.

"You will not object to my showing it to the detectives?"

"No," Alice answered, with the very slightest possible hesitation.

"There is a special reason why I should like to do so," he explained. "When we opened the packet which you and I found in the flower-pot, there lay with the gold a slip of paper; it was inscribed with this same handwriting. Now, I have not felt free to show that slip to the detectives, because it brings in the name of a person whom it is not desirable to mix up with this affair, if it can be avoided. Somebody who, from me at least, knows nothing of all that I have already told you; or of that which I wish to tell you now."

Alice gave him a quick glance, as if a sudden thought crossed her mind.

"Should you chance to guess who that individual is," said Frank hurriedly, "please don't mention your conjecture to me. I might not be able to keep my face from answering whether you were right or wrong."

"I beg your pardon if I looked as if I meant to speak," she replied. "Really I did not."

"Now this slip that you have received involves no one, you see," Frank went on eagerly. "The only name mentioned in it is my own—that of Raven. I must get at the bottom of this affair, if possible, but I would like to do so without injury or annoyance to others."

"Keep the paper, certainly," said Alice, with greater frankness, "and do with it whatever you think right." Frank did not answer.

"Don't carry those things about with you," she continued, for her quick observation detected the other slip of paper in the note-book, which he opened to put in this, received from her. "Lock them apart in your desk, Mr. Raven—though I dare say you think that sounds like a superstitious warning."

Frank smiled. Pray tell me, Miss Cleare, what harm my carrying these papers in my pocket-book can do."

Alice gave her head a curious shake; as one does when saying something little likely to be believed. "I think there may be a very subtle transmission of influence for good or evil," she said. "Why is it a comfort to us to wear little personal relics of those we love and value? Why is there a difference between the spiritual atmosphere of one house and that of another—a something which makes you feel suffocated in one and stimulated in the other, though there may be no difference that eye or ear can detect?"

"There may be a great deal in these ideas," replied Frank. "I think so, myself. But I know most people would call them fantastic."

Alice laughed. "I wouldn't tell them to most people, Mr. Raven. Or, if I did, I should put the case differently. I might ask them whether they would feel hurt to discover they had accidentally worn the gloves of a dear friend? The probable answer would be No. I would then ask how it would be if they found they had worn the gloves of a terrible criminal—a murderer, say? And I know they would instinctively go and wash their hands."

"But, look here," said Frank. "If there is any *real* difference, they ought to feel it—to experience a subtle consciousness of it, before being told the facts."

"If they are sure there is no real difference," returned Alice, "then it must be they who are fantastic to go and wash their hands after they do know the facts!"

Frank smiled, without answering.

"Only it is always best to put away, as far as possible, that which we have a doubt is neither wholesome nor happy," spoke Alice, returning to her first suggestion. "It may do us harm: it cannot be good for us. Little precautions like these outrun science itself."

"I wonder how such ideas first came into your head?"

Mrs. Connell had gone into the house. They had paused, talking, in the porch. But now they began to walk slowly back along the path.

"I think when most of those we love are dead," she said, in a low, soft tone, "our own soul and the souls of everybody around grow more real to us. Always yearning and reaching out towards the invisible, we get conscious of the invisible everywhere."

"I shall often think about you, and all you have said when I am in London again," Frank observed, for this metaphysical conversation was not much in his line. "You do not know how often I thought of you when I did not expect ever to see you again. It seems to me as if I had known you always."

But here he checked himself. This was not what he had meant to tell Alice Cleare.

"You promised to be my friend, Miss Cleare," he resumed,

speaking suddenly, and his voice changed from softness to a low, distinct energy. "I cannot leave Coltburn without telling you something which a friend ought to know—especially after your receiving that note, and trusting me as you have done."

In a few brief words he filled up the blanks left in the previous account he had given Alice of his interview with the mysterious woman. He told her everything except the allusions to "E. A." He even went so near that as to say that his future wife had been indicated in an unlikely, nay in an impossible person.

Alice listened very quietly, without any expression of sympathy. When he had finished, she looked up at him, and spoke.

"You will not forget what I said to you the other day, Mr. Raven —when we found the packet."

"No, never," Frank answered fervently.

The gate clanged at that moment, and they both turned. It was the Minister coming in. And up to that moment it had not struck Frank as strange that Alice Cleare did not seem surprised at his singular recital.

"Any news, uncle?" asked Frank.

Mr. Connell shook his head. "None whatever," he answered. "I have now come from the police station, but the detectives at present are at fault. They have hunted up ever so many people who visited this woman, Miss Beck's servant girl among them. But they can get no clue which leads anywhere, not even a good personal description of her. She had always kept her face in some kind of concealment; not one of them saw it properly. With them all she seems to have acted only as the commonest kind of fortune-teller, and to have been eager for her fees.

Frank threw a questioning glance at Alice Cleare. She understood it, for she nodded assent, and then disappeared within the house.

"Uncle Connell," said Frank, "we have something more to tell you. Miss Cleare received a note this afternoon, which she carried at once to Mrs. Connell, and which I will now show you. The handwriting is the same as that on the paper in the packet," he added, taking out his pocket-book, "as you will see."

Mr. Connell put on his spectacles and peered thoughtfully at the document. "Have you told her anything?" he asked, in a low tone.

"Everything. Except—except——" Frank's voice had dropped to a still lower key.

"Well, well, I think you were right," said Mr. Connell. "Frankness clears off many mischievous mistakes. Yes, I think you were right in your confidence, Frank; and certainly right in your single reservation, which I quite understand. I have not the least doubt of Miss Cleare."

"Doubt of her!" echoed Frank. "No, Uncle Connell, there can be no doubt of *her!*" Though he well remembered his own misgivings concerning Evelyn Agate.

But the Minister could make nothing of the anonymous letter. He had never been brought into contact with any such experiences.

Louisa Connell came down to supper that evening looking so haggard, and speaking with such manifest nervous irritability, that her father and mother and Philip held a little consultation about her later. Under Philip's advice she had been kept in ignorance of the treasure found in the flower-vase. But now that the post seemed to have become an engine in the hands of the mysterious night intruder, or else of the mysterious wise-woman, agitation and terror might possibly reach Louisa through it.

The result of this consultation was, that before the Minister went to bed, he paid a visit to their faithful servant in the kitchen.

"Minton," he said, "will you take care and meet the postman yourself for a few mornings until I give you further instructions? Watch for him also in the afternoon. All letters he may give you, no matter to whom they may be addressed, bring straight to my study. Should I happen to be out, take them to your mistress. I wish to glance at their envelopes before distributing them to their owners. Mrs. Connell and my sons know of this arrangement, and I don't suppose my servants will object," he added, loyal to his Radical and Independent views of the rights of the individual.

"It would be onreasonable if they did, sir," said Minton, dropping her old-fashioned curtsey. "I'm sure the mistress, and you too, sir, would be quite welcome to see a letter of mine if it ever came for me —which it don't. As to Julia, it have not come to post-letters for her yet, sir, and I'll take care it doesn't of one while. Yes, sir, you may depend on me: I'll bring you all the postman leaves."

Next morning, Philip and Frank took their departure for London. On their way to the train, they called at the police-station to leave the anonymous letter sent to Alice Cleare, and to communicate their metropolitan address. It was the courteous and chatty Mr. Jones who received them.

"Oh, ho," said he, scanning the paper. "The Raven ghost, eh! Strikes me this is the best clue you've brought us yet, gentlemen. Don't you be surprised, sir"—turning to Frank—"if you get a visit from somebody you've not seen before," he added, as he took down the London address. "We are doing our best ourselves from a public point of view—but perhaps I ought to tell you that Mr. Cran is not exactly one of us now. He has just retired from the service on his pension. But a good case is to him what a fox is to a hound: and he can now do things which we might not feel inclined to undertake officially. I wouldn't take upon me to say that he has not got his eye fixed somewhere in Ravenstoke already," concluded the speaker, in a marked tone of meaning. "But he won't bother you, sir; that's not Cran's way. As soon as he has anything worth your hearing, sir, you'll hear; not before."

Frank returned his thanks as he left the police station with Philip. And then—away! And the last glimpse they caught of Coltburn was of the dingy walls and sordid windows of Daylight Villa.

Philip recovered his somewhat flagging spirits the moment he set foot on London pavement. Frank followed him, rather quietly, to the snug, shadowy Temple Chambers. He felt that eerie sense of unreality which we all feel when we return to a familiar scene, after undergoing a new and strange experience. Was this real, or that? He could have almost asked himself whether there was such a place as Coltburn, while the vaticinations of the Oriental Mystery seemed but as the intricacies of a nightmare. But—there was Alice Cleare! If she was a dream, then she was of those dreams which come but once in a lifetime, and are never forgotten.

Philip's letters had been sent punctually to him at Coltburn, therefore he did not expect to find many awaiting him. One only lay on his table, delivered by that morning's post. He took it up with an exclamation of pleasure. For it was from his old friend, Gertrude Agate. And it seemed like a welcome back to the best side of his London existence. Its contents were but short.

"DEAR MR. CONNELL,—I am told you and your cousin are likely to be back in London by the time this will reach the Temple. Will you both come over and see me as soon as you conveniently can? I want you rather particularly. I have just had a letter from Evelyn; and unless Mr. Frank has had very recent advices from the Court, he may like to see it, for it has little bits of news that will be interesting to him. Not that I am dragging you here about that, but to ask your advice concerning a very different matter, which has filled myself with perplexity, and aroused the nervous terrors of my servant, Davies. Do come as soon as you can.

"Faithfully yours, GERTRUDE AGATE."

"Read it, Frank!" exclaimed Philip. "We will go to her this very evening."

(To be continued.)

JANE AUSTEN.

THE scent of long withered violets will fill with sweetness the place where the dead flowers lie. A distillation made from violet petals—petals that were kissed by soft breezes on the sunny slopes of Provence many a spring ago, makes fragrant to-day ball-room and drawing-room amid the throng, and rattle, and bustle of Parisian or London life.

When we sit down to write the story of Jane Austen, we find ourselves in much the same position as he who would endeavour to give a word picture of the violet; and yet how many millions, to whom the creations of her genius are as household friends, would long to have a distinct notion of what the woman was like when she moved and spoke upon earth, to whom they owe such hours of real unmixed amusement and delight. What a delicate subtle charm hangs about her painting of female character, what a skill she has in bringing before us the scenes and people of every-day existence. And yet how simple, and almost childlike her own nature seems to have been; how limited was the social sphere in which her whole life was spent. Girls are still laughing over her pages; the keenest critics of to-day still make her style and manner the standard of excellence; her books crowd our bookstalls; and yet, as we glance back at her life, and expect to find something strange and wonderful, we see only a sweet, modest woman walking along a retired commonplace path through the world.

Towards the latter half of the Eighteenth Century, when people in London were talking a great deal about the war in America, and Burke was thundering, and Queen Charlotte was looking prim, a clergyman called Austen and his wife, who was a clergyman's daughter, were living in the vicarage of Steventon, near Basingstoke in Hampshire, and seeming, as they went about their daily round of small ordinary cares, and duties, and pleasures, to be as far removed from anything or anyone connected with world-wide fame as it was well possible for a pair to be; yet they were to be the parents of a child whose name was to be famous, and who was to be as much spoken of in after times as either Edmund Burke or Queen Charlotte. Year by year an increasing group of children filled the vicarage nursery; there came five boys, there came two girls; the name of the eldest daughter was Cassandra, the name of the younger, who was three years Cassandra's junior, was Jane, she was born in 1775.

There was not too much money in the Vicar's household. The boys, two of whom chose the navy as their profession, had to be thought of first, as was always the fashion in those days, when it was deemed necessary for young ladies to possess but a very scanty share

of intellectual culture. No especial care, therefore, was given to the education of the two girls. Jane Austen grew up in a simple, untrammelled way in her country home, inhaling steady religious principle, and high moral tone day by day in the healthy social atmosphere of the vicarage without being aware of it; romping and laughing with her brothers up and down the shady walks of the vicarage garden; learning in-doors to be a proficient with her needle, which she remained all her life, reading any book that came in her way, and understanding it, more or less, according to what the book might be; picking up stray grains of knowledge of all kinds, from how to make a pudding to how the English constitution was framed; beginning already to use her bright young eyes for looking into the natures and characters of the men and women around her, and reading their motives, and marking their foibles and peculiarities.

Her closest, sweetest friend, from her very earliest years till her very latest upon earth, her companion, who never failed to give her sympathy whether tears or smiles were on her face, the confidant of her first literary efforts, the sharer of her girlish dreams and fancies, the tender nurse of her last days, was her sister Cassandra. Almost in her babyhood Jane began to take a baby's pride in imitating every one of Cassandra's ways and words, until the whole family were kept in a constant ring of laughter at the monkey-like mimicry; and from that time forward the lamp of love burnt on steadfastly between the sisters, till the time when, in middle life, Jane passed away, and Cassandra was left to travel on sadly alone into old age, and to tell a new generation more than anyone else could tell about the story of Jane Austen, the writer, whose books in her life-time had been so little read, whose reputation was growing slowly into a fair flower that was to blossom more and more freely.

But to return to Jane Austen in her girlhood. Years went on, and Jane was now a woman grown, a woman endowed with no small share of personal attractions, her figure was tall and flexible; her hair was flecked with warm auburn tints that went twinkling in an out amid the folds of glossy brown; there was sly mirth peeping out of her radiant expressive eyes; there was serious sweetness in the full rosy mouth; there was heart and there was thought in every line of her face, where the ready changeful blushes went and came so swiftly. The Austens were well connected in Hampshire, and when Jane came out she mixed in some of the best society of the county.

Country visiting was a very different thing in those days from what it is now. The far fewer facilities for travel made a much smaller number of families go to London to yawn and bustle, by turns, through the season, as ladies and gentlemen do to-day in the middle of the favoured nineteenth century. The part of the world who have education and leisure, had, too, in those times, a much shorter list of amusements and recreations than they have among our modern selves. There were no Mudie's boxes hastening hither and

thither through the length and breadth of the land. The arrival of the weekly newspaper was an event of grave importance in families where weekly newspapers came; rare was the visit to the watering-place, and rarer still was the Swiss or Highland tour. This was why a hundred years ago, people made amusements for themselves in their country homes and their immediate country neighbourhoods. A dinner-party was then no hasty affair beginning at eight and ending at eleven, but a solemn lengthy business that commenced with a solid dinner at two, and concluded with a yet more solid supper at nine. A ball at the county town was a real holiday for every girl, whether plain or pretty, within ten miles round; and the room was one buzz and sparkle of fun and frolic and high spirits.

It was not, then, difficult in times like those, for a lively intelligence like that of Jane Austen, an intelligence in which the sacred flame of genius was already beginning to kindle a glow, to find, even in country society, types of character which she could photograph on her memory and keep there, till at some future period—a period of which however she, herself, probably only dimly foresaw, as yet, the coming. They were to be reproduced in her novels in pictures all instinct with the warm breathing life that her master-hand and brain would put into them. Her keen power of observation does not appear, however, to have made her dull in general company. She chattered, and laughed, and danced, with the merriest girls in Hampshire.

By degrees the real bent of her mind made its way to the surface, as in the summer-time, the gaily-tinted insects rise to the surface of the brook, gradually to meet the rays of the noontide sun. It was not a writing age with young ladies, except when, three or four times a year, they despatched a stupendously long letter. She had most likely never been in the company of a male or female author in her life; yet still she could not resist the inclination to weave into a connected history some of the scenes and images which had lately begun to stand out with such vivid distinctness in her mind. At first, the project was hardly revealed, even to Cassandra, but by-and-bye she grew bolder; and as the daughters of the family had no little private den or boudoir which they could call their own in the house, she began calmly to follow her new employment in the parlour, which formed the general sitting-room, making no more of it, and no more insisting on grave reverent silence being kept by the tongues around her, than if she were stitching a shirt, or hemming a pocket-handkerchief.

The image of Jane Austen at this period, when, as a girl of twenty-one, she began authorship almost without knowing what the dignity of authorship meant, rises up before us as a rare, pleasant picture in the history of literature; and we cannot help pausing to dwell for a moment upon it.

The roomy family parlour is not exactly a scene of tidiness and elegance this bright winter morning, when both the sunshine and the

fire-light are playing on the oak panels; but it is a scene of a good deal of work and merriment instead. There are objects of all kinds lying about on the numerous little side-tables, from the vicar's half-finished sermon to a half-knitted stocking; there is Cassandra making a dress, and a boy-brother a kite. There are a couple of a yet younger generation, too, in the room, and not exactly adding to the general peace and comfort by various lively representations they are giving of horses, and cows, and other animals. Some of the elder sons of the house married early, and the children are having a merry time of it in grandpapa's parlour; and by no means sparing, with their questions, and other delicate attentions in the way of pulls and pinches, a pretty young lady who is sitting writing at a little, unpretending desk, and whom they call "Aunt Jane." How playfully she smiles down on them, how readily the answer comes to some bit of village news told by the house-mother, who has just come bustling in, jingling her keys. Who would think that books that will be read and re-read by thousands when a century is gone by, are being written by that fair girl, who is behaving as sweetly and calmly as though she were doing nothing more difficult than threading her needle? Yet, just under these circumstances, were "Pride and Prejudice" "Sense and Sensibility" written. The fact illustrates in a singular degree the broad, tranquil, genial character of Jane Austen's genius.

But though "Pride and Prejudice" and "Sense and Sensibility" were written by Jane Austen at this early period, it was not till several years after that they found their way into print. A journey from Hampshire to London was no small undertaking for a clergyman's family in those days; and how was Jane to find a publisher without leaving her country home? As for writing to a publisher, that was an adventurous course which never entered her mind. So the two MSS. were put carefully away; and, before long, a third, entitled "Northanger Abbey," joined them in the drawer where they lay. How, as she bent over this latter, must the children have wondered at the smiles which went silently chasing each other over Aunt Jane's face, as in this story she satirized the fashionable novels of the day, that dealt so plentifully in gloomy horrors. Jane Austen seems to have had, at this period, no definite plan about bringing her books before the public, and she probably had no notion of the real value of what she had produced; for writing had been, for her, so much like what singing is for the song-bird. But still she had in her character the quiet, enduring hopefulness, which is so often one of the marked features of genius; and she calmly bided her time for opportunities which might come.

The first change in Jane Austen's life, which had, on the whole, in it fewer changes than the lives of most people, was brought about by her father's health forcing him and his family to leave Steventon and go and live in Bath. Here Jane found innumerable fresh studies of

character in the motley assembly of men and women which, in those days, made Bath a perfect kaleidoscope of humanity, in which appeared, in turns, statesmen and fine ladies, bishops and actresses, young dandies dressed in the newest mode, and old soldiers smelling of powder. In Bath, too, she made her first attempt to appear in print. "Northanger Abbey" was offered to a publisher in that city, but he would only give £10 for the copyright of the book, which ran so entirely counter to the literary tastes of the day. Even Jane Austen's inexperience drew back at such a proposal as this, and "Northanger Abbey" returned into private life for the present. The young authoress may have shed a few tears in secret at this disappointment, but her smiles were as bright, and her ways as sweet and gracious as ever, and still she re-read and revised her MSS. from time to time, and still she gave careful heed to all her home duties, and still she waited for a day which was to come.

On Mr. Austen's death, which took place a few years after the change of residence to Bath, his widow and her two daughters returned to Hampshire, and went to live in Southampton, where they took a house at the corner of Castle Square in that town. This was, probably, the most uncongenial place to Jane Austen that her home was ever fixed in; there were no pleasant country walks there as there used to be at Steventon, and there was no cultivated society such as she enjoyed in Bath. Southampton had, however, one great charm for Jane Austen in the frequent opportunities it gave for meetings with her sailor brothers, who were always her especial favourites and pets, and of her intercourse with whom many traces may be found in her novels.

Mrs. Austen and her daughters did not live very long at Southampton. Among their most intimate friends was a wealthy landowner, a Mr. Knight, of Chawton House, near Winchester. He proposed that the widow and her children should come and make their home at Chawton Cottage, a pretty little house on his property. The offer was gladly accepted by the three ladies, and thither they went, and settled down cheerily and happily. It was at about this period, some fourteen or fifteen years after they were written, that "Pride and Prejudice" and "Sense and Sensibility" found a publisher, and made their way out into the world. They were fairly well received by the public, and brought their author some small remuneration; but they were far from making any remarkable stir and noise in the kingdom of letters, such as was made when "Evelina" first appeared, or when, in later days, "Jane Eyre" flashed into universal notice.

The success was very moderate. But it was sufficient to make such a writer as Jane Austen, whose nature was running over with sweet waters that could know no bitterness, who had in herself a calm consciousness of power that nothing could quench or daunt, whose soul was a true artist's soul, that cares more for the work itself than for the praise or honour it brings, that will create for the mere joy of

creating, take up her pen again with renewed force and vigour in her hand. "Mansfield Park" and "Emma" were soon produced, and brought out, and won more favour than their predecessors, and more money as well; though, in this latter respect, when we think of the prices paid by publishers in our own days, Jane Austen's success certainly seems wondrously scanty.

She was quietly content, however; there was never a grain of repining despondency in her character. She would smile, and say to Cassandra, that her style and manner in her books was like miniature-painting on a two-inch square bit of ivory, and that it was little wonder it took people a long while to look into her work, and appreciate its merits. Still, though she was thus calm, and happy, and busy, we cannot help wishing that she could have enjoyed a part, at least, of the distinction which has been hers since her death; that she could have heard Scott say, in his generous enthusiasm, as he laid down one of her books, that he could do the big bow-wow style very well, but that in delicate delineation of character he was far behind her; that she could have caught a few notes of the praise given her by such critics as Lord Macaulay and Professor Morley; that she could have had a vision of her novels in the hands of the young England of to-day.

"Persuasion" was Jane Austen's last book. It was published after her death, together with "Northanger Abbey." The seeds of consumption began to show themselves in her constitution when she was about forty, but bodily disease in no way blunted her mental strength. Some of her friends to whom she read the MS. of "Persuasion" said that the end of the story was tame, and, nettled at the remark, she set to work, and re-wrote the last chapters with a verve and spirit that made them an almost unequalled bit of her handiwork. As her health grew worse, the little family at Chawton Cottage moved into a house in Winchester, in order that Jane Austen might be under the immediate care of an eminent physician in that town. But no medical skill could avail. She sank gradually, watched over by the tenderest love till the last, till in 1817 her soul went up to God, and her body was laid in Winchester Cathedral. She has left to all time, not only her books, but a picture of what a female author and artist should be: true to home duties, while she is true to her genius; delicate and brilliant in her work, yet without a word having ever dropt from her pen that can offend the blush of modesty, and with the highest moral tone breathing in every line.

ALICE KING.

MY SATURDAYS.

ARCHIE'S LADYE-LOVE.

I.

THERE is no time for confidences like Sunday evenings. I mean, of course, with quiet people, whose Sundays have a character of their own, and are not merely disorganised week-days.

Such a quiet Sunday Archibald Rintoul had been spending with me; and we were seeing the last of it, sitting by the river just after sunset. I had a low cane chair under the great horse-chestnut, and he lay on the grass at my feet, luxuriating in a rug and a cushion. Everything was still and at rest, yet not oppressively silent. My book lay on my lap, and peacefully there went out into the evening air the tender wreaths from Archie's pipe.

"Aunt," he said at last; "do you know that Lady Anderton and Miss Moville are coming to stay with Lady Jacobs?"

"No," I said, startled but cautious; "I had not heard it. Will they be here long enough for it to be worth while for me to call on them?"

"I believe they are going to stay some time. I thought, as you like to have a variety of guests for your Saturday afternoon parties, you might care to invite them." Archie puffed away very vigorously, whereby I knew that he was embarrassed, for he is usually a leisurely smoker.

"Lady Jacobs always comes, so that if I knew of her having guests, I could not fail to invite them without being rude. If they were lesser folk, she would be sure to bring them with her; but, of course, Lady Anderton and her daughter would expect to be called upon in due state. However, I don't yet know of them officially."

"How do you expect to know of them officially?" Archie inquired, rather crossly.

"Oh! by seeing them in church, or meeting them out with her, or something of the sort. There is no hurry, at any rate; and besides, I don't believe Lady Anderton would come to my afternoons. She would be afraid of meeting the doctor's wife, and think that I was fishing for a viscountess to exhibit to the townspeople."

"Just as you please, of course," growled Archie, and subsided into his pipe. I reflected seriously on the chances of receiving a snub from the lady in question, as compared with those of forwarding my nephew's wishes, which were now becoming apparent to me, and resumed persuasively:

"Archie, should you like me to call on them?"

"Don't expose yourself to a refusal to please me, if you think there is any chance of it," he answered, somewhat sulkily.

"My dear boy, I'd expose myself to twenty refusals to please you, if it *is* to please you. That was all I wanted to know. Don't you know that I would?" I said impetuously, stooping forward to touch his shoulder.

Archie's shoulder remained irresponsive, but his voice did not. It was rather shaky as he replied:

"You're a brick, Aunty; and I know you'll always stand by a fellow, and help him to make a fool of himself."

It was too delicious to find my able nephew ready to make a fool of himself for me to quarrel just then with the particular form of helpfulness imputed to me. I only asked:

"How far has it gone?"

"No way at all. I'm done for; but I don't know if she knows it; and if she does, I haven't an idea what she thinks of it."

"Can't you tell me a little about it?"

"Well, I met her last spring; she was presented then, and I just saw her once or twice, at Mrs. Villiers'. I knew at once she was not like anybody else; and when I did get a dance and a talk with her, we seemed to understand each other; but there were always crowds of men round her, and I couldn't see much of her, and didn't try to. Of course I had more sense than to waste my time dangling after a girl like that in her first season, bound to make a grand match." Puff, puff, went the pipe, until I had to give a little pull at the thread of Archie's confidences.

"She has not made it, though."

"No, though one big fish, at least, was very hard hit. One hears that sort of thing at the clubs from those idiots who have nothing to do but chatter about their neighbours' affairs. I hated to hear them take her name into their mouths; but somehow I couldn't help listening—and then you can't knock a fellow down for mentioning a young lady you have danced with twice."

"Scarcely. Have you seen her again this season?"

"Yes, very often. Lady Anderton took it into her head to catch measles—such a notion for a woman of her age! But it is just like her; she's a kind of decrepit elderly chicken. Miss Moville was away for a day or two somewhere, when it came on, and she wouldn't let her come near her, but sent her to begin the season under Mrs. Villiers' wing. That was the only good turn her ladyship ever did me, and she wouldn't have done that if she could have helped it. Mrs. Villiers, you know, is not at all exclusive. She goes in for culture and wide sensibilities. She and I are great chums; she writes verses and a story, now and then, that are not half bad, and I get them published for her, and have the run of her house in return."

"Archie," I said, solemnly, "tell the truth. Did you ever get a line of Mrs. Villiers' published before you knew that she was a friend of Miss Moville's?"

"I don't keep a diary, and can't tell you," he answered, with a rather shamefaced laugh. "Let the fact suffice. Miss Moville stayed with her for a month, and I dined there twice, and went to a ball, and to the theatre with them, and to afternoon tea as often as I dared, and met them at other places. After that, Lady Anderton got well again (worse luck!), and took Miss Moville home. She was at Mrs. Villiers' one afternoon when I called, and was quite friendly; but when I called at her own house and found her in, she was nervously chilly; and when I called again, she was not at home, though the carriage had just gone round from the door."

"And how did her daughter treat you?"

"Her stepdaughter, you mean. The first Lady Anderton died two years after her marriage. Miss Moville—Imogen—the name is just like her—has been brought up by her stepmother, and always calls her mamma. Her father was a weak-minded, extravagant sort of man, and they can't be well off for their rank. Of course, Lady Anderton is always angling for a coronet for Imogen, but I do believe she scorns all that petty scheming. She was always thoroughly friendly with me when we were alone together, or just in a comfortable set at Mrs. Villiers'; and I did think that we understood each other. But since she has gone home, I never seem to be able to get at her; I meet her sometimes, but she is always in a crowd, and I know I shan't be welcome. When I do get a word or a look, it is constrained, and puts me at a greater distance than ever. Sometimes I think she was only amusing herself with me in the spring." His voice grew hoarse again, and the pipe resumed vigorous action.

"But now, Archie, if you did meet her, what do you want to do? Are you ready to ask her to be your wife? Because, if not, I think you will only make yourself more unhappy by seeing more of her."

"I must see more of her somehow, and find out what she means. If she's going in for a coronet, you may be sure I'll keep out of the way."

"And if not?"

"What's the good of talking about it? As if she would ever be allowed to marry me! It would be giving up her rank, and quarrelling with her relations, and probably she would be miserable when she had done it; she would want her French maid and her morning cup of tea, and her autumnal visits to country-houses."

"I should think your income would stand the cup of tea, and even the French maid—if not the autumn visits. If Miss Moville is a true-hearted woman, and really loves you, she won't think twice about giving up mere luxuries; and if she is neither loving nor strong enough to break her chains to come to you, you must only break yours and go away from her. Love ought to bring faith. You love her and don't trust her. I don't know if she is worthy of trust; but if not, she is not worthy of love."

"She is worthy of anything," he answered.

"Well, I will try and bring her here; and perhaps the spell of London society may be broken by crossing this running water."

We were silent. The glory had softened into a ruddy glow, which was growing fainter as we looked; soft airs breathed over the broad stream, and brought the scent of meadow-sweet; a sleepy bird gave an occasional twitter, and wakeful bats began sweeping round. Must not all hateful enchantments give way before such sweet influences, and hearts grow natural and tender and true, alone with the river and the summer and Love?

"I wish she were here to-night," said Archie softly.

II.

The Honourable Imogen Moville was busy packing. She was very hot, a little tired, and not in the best of tempers. Archie no doubt imagined that when she was going anywhere, that terrible French maid took all trouble off her hands, and left her to float in and out of the railway carriage with not even the preliminary exertion of taking her ticket herself. But, in fact, Pauline's great recommendation was her skill in dressmaking; and her time was too fully taken up with making and re-making her two mistresses' dresses, to save expense, for her to be of the least use in smoothing the bye-ways of life. So Imogen's morning had been spent in dusting and stowing away the innumerable pieces of china and knick-knackery which crowded the drawing-room tables, repressing a vicious inclination to let a tray-full of them drop, and so lessen her labours for the future, and then in some jobs of necessary mending quite beneath Pauline's talents. The latter had been finishing off Imogen's travelling-dress, and at the last moment Lady Anderton had insisted upon a wholly superfluous flounce, merely because there was a piece of the material left to make it of. Whereby it came to pass that Pauline was still stitching frantically, and Imogen—her cheeks flushed and her magnificent auburn hair very rough—was doing the packing against time.

"There!" she said, standing up after violently compressing the contents of a large trunk; "if mamma does not want her dresses crushed, she must let Pauline have time to fold them. I should not in the least mind doing that or anything else, if I only knew that I had to do it, and could take proper time, and had not to take desperate care never to divulge that I do anything useful; but it is all such a stop-gap business. I hate living in a mess!"

It is not exclusively on the stage that people soliloquise; I have known a few women in private life take that means of relieving their minds. Imogen Moville was one of these.

A thundering knock came to the door of the little house in Curzon Street, and she naturally reconnoitred from the window.

"Uncle Anderton! Of all the days for him to call! And I did hope that we should slip off to Tamston without his knowing!

Now I shall have to go downstairs presently, whether we miss the train or not." And she plunged desperately into her boxes again.

Downstairs, Lord Anderton was being shown into the denuded drawing-room, where his sister-in-law did not venture to keep him waiting for a moment. Archie has already sketched her; so I need only add that she was an undoubted lady by manners as well as by birth, well-dressed by help of her maid, and terribly afraid of Imogen's bachelor uncle.

"How do you do, Constantia? You never told me that you were moving."

"Oh, we are only going out of town for a fortnight or so. Won't you sit down?"

"I don't think there's anything to sit upon," said his lordship, looking round with profound distaste upon the chairs, a little pushed out of their usual places. "I dislike déménagements, and would not have intruded upon you had I had the advantage of being informed of your intentions."

"Indeed I meant to write and let you know; but I have had no time since it was settled, and I have not seen you. Imogen would have written to you to-morrow."

"Of course I cannot expect to know your plans before they are executed. Perhaps when my niece writes, she will put an address on her letter; ah! true, it will have a post-mark."

"We are going to Lady Jacobs', near Tamston. She is a very old friend of mine, you know; we were girls together, and she has a nice little place quite in the country. So refreshing in this hot weather, you know; and dear Imogen has quite set her heart on going."

"Doubtless, Constantia, you have good reasons for taking my niece down to the country so soon, before everyone else goes, and losing two or three of the last weeks of the season. I do not for a moment question your discretion, or dispute your authority; but I may be permitted to express my surprise."

Poor Lady Anderton fluttered in her chair. She had no better reasons to adduce than that she wished to go, and Imogen wished to go; and she felt their miserable inadequacy. They died unuttered on her tongue.

"Were it not so," continued Lord Anderton, impressively, "I should ask if you are aware that Lord Sandgate leaves for the Mediterranean as soon as his duties in Parliament permit? His attentions to Imogen have been marked; and I doubt not that with judicious conduct on your part and hers, a favourable result might ensue. But it cannot be expected that a young man, who is heir to one of the richest peerages in England, should prosecute a suit in the face of a distinct slight; and such—I do not hesitate to say—is your leaving town just now."

"Really," pleaded the culprit, "I had no reason to believe that

Lord Sandgate had any serious intentions. He has danced with Imogen, of course, and called here occasionally; but I never saw anything to make me think——"

"Doubtless," said his lordship, with crushing irony, "I was entirely mistaken."

"Oh, no!" said his sister-in-law hurriedly: "it was only my stupidity. Dear Imogen has so many admirers, and things so often come to nothing."

"Probably, if treated with neglect. But it is not necessary for me to point out to you, Constantia, that the functions of a chaperon are to see that they do *not* come to nothing—that is to say, when what you call *things* (by which, I presume, that you mean possible alliances) are of a suitable nature. Such, in an eminent degree, would be the union of Lord Sandgate with my niece. And, as I have before informed you, if she should make such a marriage—or any other with my approval—I will settle £5000 on her at the time, and make her heiress of my unentailed property. The Honourable Imogen Moville is not a milkmaid whose face is her fortune."

"You are very good," murmured Lady Anderton, "but it is so unfortunate that Imogen cannot bear Lord Sandgate. Though, of course, in time, she might change her mind; or perhaps ——"

"I had hoped," said Lord Anderton, severely, "that education would have instilled into Imogen's mind tastes and tendencies becoming her position and destiny. If not, there must have been some great mistake somewhere. The mind of a young girl is plastic in the hands of her instructors."

This speech appeared to the speaker so crushing and irrefutable as quite to restore his equanimity. The hearer mentally wished that *he* had had the task of Imogen's education; and she replied with some spirit:

"I can assure you that all young girls are not so easily managed, and, certainly, Imogen is not. She is very peculiar in some ways."

"I have observed that, and with regret. Personal peculiarities are angles of which good breeding is intolerant. I am willing to believe that you find it difficult to deal with her; but *I* will put the matter before her. Is she at home?"

"Oh, yes, she is getting ready; we are going by the 5.40 train. I will send for her; but, indeed, I think you will find it will do no good to talk to her about Lord Sandgate. It is more likely to set her against him; and I will ask him here as soon as we come back."

"I accept your hint not to delay you, Constantia, and will not keep you longer from your toilette de voyage. But I presume that you scarcely intend to limit the subjects of my conversation with my niece."

"Indeed, I did not mean to hurry you," said poor Lady Anderton, ringing violently in her nervousness. "I only just mentioned it, and

there is plenty of time. You know I am always glad to have the benefit of your advice. Of course, I feel that it is a dreadful responsibility."

"You allude, I presume, to the charge of your stepdaughter," he answered, somewhat appeased. "If you really desire my advice, it is that you carefully seclude her from undesirable associations; such, for instance, as she encountered at the house of our very unwise cousin, Sophia Villiers. I date a change for the worse in her general tone from her visit there."

"I assure you, if you are thinking about Mr. Rintoul, that I have been very careful. I was not at home to him when he called last, and she has scarcely met him anywhere since she came back to me."

"Enough, enough," said her brother-in-law magnificently, waving his hand. "I trust that Imogen would know better what is due to herself; but she is imprudent, very imprudent, and you cannot be too careful. I will speak to her."

At this moment Imogen entered, exhilarated from a victory over the last over-filled Gladstone, irritated by her hurried day, and altogether in a dangerous mood. The dust of labour had been removed from her pretty hands, but the light of battle was in her eyes. Lord Anderton, however, never paid attention to anyone's symptoms but his own, and he took no warning.

"How do you do, my dear?" he began graciously. "I was surprised to hear from your mamma that you were going to the country, but I hope that you will have a pleasant visit."

"Thank you, uncle," responded Imogen. "It is sure to be pleasant, since I shall be out of town."

"I am sorry that the society of London is not agreeable to you," replied her uncle stiffly; "especially since I was about to impress on you that you should not urge your mamma to remain away longer than the time originally fixed for her visit."

"I suppose," said Imogen wickedly, "that mamma will stay as long as she is enjoying herself."

This was an unkind cut to the unfortunate lady, and she protested eagerly.

"Oh, no, indeed, dear: I am just going to oblige Lady Jacobs, and we can only stay for the fortnight. We cannot be longer away from town just now."

"I did not know that you had pressing business, mamma; and I can see no reason why you should not stay as long as you are enjoying yourself."

"Lady Anderton has other motives besides enjoyment," said her brother-in-law solemnly. "She thinks of her duty towards you, Imogen; and that requires that she should not withhold you from the advantages of society."

"Does it indeed?" Imogen answered. "Duty is so difficult to understand. But there is all about it in the catechism, I know. Let

me see: My duty towards my daughter is to dress her as myself, and to do unto her as my mother did to me, to introduce her, to sit up all night with her, to choose her partners, to keep from her poor men, to sell her at last to the highest bidder. That's the code, isn't it? But I can't remember where it comes in."

Lady Anderton began to cry. Lord Anderton rejoined with crushing severity:

"Sarcasm and disrespect are not in any code of duty with which I am acquainted. It is true that I have not learnt the modern ones affected by independent young ladies."

"I did not mean to vex you, mamma," Imogen apologised. "I was only talking in a general way. I know you want to do your duty by me in the best way you can."

"Yes, Imogen," resumed her uncle. "If you feel that, repay her by doing your duty towards her, towards me, towards yourself. That will be done by cultivating a becoming and refined tone of mind, and by avoiding such levity as might lay you open to injurious imputations, and lose you the opportunity of an advantageous settlement."

Imogen flushed up to her broad forehead. "To what do you allude, uncle?" she asked, as haughtily as he could himself have spoken.

"I allude to the prospect now open to you of a marriage with Lord Sandgate—one which would meet with my entire approval—which is in danger of being compromised by your present withdrawal from town, and will be entirely forfeited if your absence is prolonged, or if, on your return, you do not behave to him in a distinctly encouraging manner. I allude also to the remarks to which a flirtation that you carried on this spring with a gentleman have given rise, and for the repetition of which, I trust you will give no cause."

"And I beg to assure you, uncle, that if anyone chooses to gossip about me because I prefer conversation with men of ability to dancing with titled nonentities, they are likely to have more cause, as I do not intend to change my tastes. You may dismiss from your mind all idea of my marrying Lord Sandgate; I do not believe he has any intention of asking me to do so, and, if he did, I should refuse him without a moment's hesitation."

"Imogen!" implored Lady Anderton; but her brother-in-law checked her.

"Pray allow the young lady to conclude."

"I have only to add that, as we must start in twenty minutes, you will excuse me if I go to change my dress. Yes; perhaps, as you take so kind an interest in the subject of my acquaintances, you may care to know that Mr. Rintoul—whose name you have heard—has friends at Tamston, so that there is a prospect of some agreeable society."

Imogen swept a magnificent curtsey, and retired. She rushed

upstairs, and wasted half her dressing-time in tears of angry shame at having been provoked into mentioning Archibald's name. Meantime Lady Anderton retreated into her pocket-handkerchief, and Lord Anderton merely remarked: "Lamentable, lamentable! Good-bye, Constantia; good-bye."

III.

I soon became very non-officially aware of the arrival of Lady Anderton, daughter, and maid, at Lady Jacobs'; for, to tell the truth, the butcher's boy told my cook, and she told me. Under ordinary circumstances, I should have scorned to act upon information so acquired; but when Thursday came, and I had received none of a more dignified kind, I put my pride in my pocket for Archie's sake, and determined not to waste a Saturday. To tell the truth, I was burning with curiosity to see the girl who had so completely subjugated my not very impressible nephew; and remembering his praises of Rhoda Lingard, I prepared to spread my sheltering wing over something very soft and sweet. If I had then had the advantage which my reader possesses of being privy to the conversation in the last chapter, I should have been less surprised at a fresh illustration of the old truth, that men praise one sort of woman, and love another.

What I saw was a girl whom a woman would at once describe by the adjective *stylish*. Her fashionable and elaborate toilette, in two shades of brown, caught my eye at once, and reminded me by contrast of the poetic simplicity of Rhoda's dresses. Her rich auburn hair was so admirably puffed out and drawn back, to suit the curves of the gold and brown satin and feathers of her hat, that I was tormented with a silly desire to see how it would look with the hat off, and a conviction that it would not be fit to be seen. Her manner was quiet and dignified, and seemed to me as deliberately selected as her dress; she had an air of being on her guard, and spoke little. Everything about her was formal and self-conscious, except her eyes, and they won forgiveness for all the rest. Clear, honest, golden-brown, exquisitely framed in dark eyebrows and long lashes; the candid soul looked out through them, and scorned its cage. The spacious low white brow above looked as honest as themselves, and all the artificiality of frills and furbelows dropped away when you met that steady gaze.

The party had just come in from driving, and of course tea followed, which dear, fat, fussy Lady Jacobs insisted on pouring out herself, with much spilling into saucers, and many mistakes as to who took sugar and who did not, and which Miss Moville handed round with a peculiarly courteous grace. She was very attentive to me in a quiet way, but we had no conversation. I had met Lady

Anderton before, and had not particularly loved her; she had a certain acid insipidity that turned my milk of human kindness sour, but which I believe was only the whey squeezed out of her by a long course of oppression. Whether she liked it or no, it was impossible for her to refuse my personally-given invitation to my afternoons, especially when her hostess declared that she always went, they were most delightful, and she would not miss one for anything. Miss Moville did not say a word, but assented to my hope (when leaving) of seeing her on Saturday.

Saturday came, and with it Archie, early. He devoted himself to superintending all my arrangements, and gave me a good deal more trouble than he saved, after the manner of men when they try to help women. I do not mean to deny that they can do many things much better than we can; they can cut pencils, tie up parcels, speculate in stocks, draught Queen's speeches, and commit burglary, in a manner quite inimitable by the weaker sex; but however successfully they may act on their own initiative, they are of no use as assistants, for they always want to do things in their own way, instead of yours. I suppose it is their inherent superiority which makes them unable to work in a subordinate capacity. Probably it is the same superiority which makes them always require the attendance of women, when they do condescend to acts of domestic usefulness. From Adam downwards they have never been able to do without us; and really, on the whole, we can do very well without them.

Very late, when Archibald had been fuming for half an hour, and I had begun to despair, Lady Jacobs' carriage drove up; but it only contained two ladies. Fortunately, they were the right two. It was soon explained that Lady Anderton had a sick headache, and I believe all concerned felt that she could not have had one more àpropos. Imogen, in a lovely dress of écru Indian silk, embroidered in brown and gold—evidently her pet colours—with a quantity of crimson and tea rosebuds clustered beneath the lace round her throat, looked a different being. Her cheek glowed with excitement, and she talked and laughed to me quite merrily. Instead of being stiff, she was shy, and did not seem willing to let Archie draw her away from Lady Jacobs' side; but the invaluable tennis soon settled that, and having once launched them in partnership, I knew that it lay with her how much of the afternoon they should spend together, now that there were no sharp eyes to watch them.

Good-natured Lady Jacobs settled herself down for a comfortable gossip.

"My dear," she began, "you haven't a conception of the slavery that poor girl lives in. That uncle of hers, and that poor, weak-minded mother, are just in a conspiracy to worry her into marrying some young booby with a peerage. Poor Constantia! there never was a woman so spoilt by being made a viscountess. Because she

was not born to a title, she has the most ridiculous ideas about her duty to the order which has done her the honour of adopting her into its ranks."

"Miss Moville does not share these ideas?"

"Not she; she has no nonsense about her. Her mother was a country doctor's daughter, yet a lady, if ever there was one. The most sensible thing her husband ever did was marrying her; she kept him straight, and might have made a man of him if she had lived; but he was made of poor stuff, my dear, poor stuff. Worn thin, I suppose, by having had so many successive coats-of-arms worked on it."

"There is nothing effete about his daughter."

"No, she has inherited the robustness of the other side, and it turns to rebelliousness now and then. I don't mind telling you, my dear, because you never gossip; but there was a dreadful scene about coming here to-day. You won't be offended, I know, because it was nothing personal to you; but it seems that they don't want her to meet Mr. Rintoul, and I, not knowing, let out that he was your nephew. Constantia Anderton is subject to sick headaches; but I am sure hers was nothing to signify this morning, though she made it an excuse for staying at home, and wanting Imogen to stay with her. However, Imogen would not stay; she said when her mother had headaches, she never allowed anyone to be in the room with her but that French maid, and what was the use of her sitting downstairs? Of course, I backed her up, and then Lady Anderton went into a regular state, and accused her of neglecting her, and wanting to meet your nephew, and cried and sobbed and reproached her."

"In your presence?"

"Well, not exactly; I had gone into the garden, then; but their window was wide open, and Constantia has such a high voice, one could not help hearing. At last, she said that she would go too, if it killed her—she would be faithful to her trust, and guard her dead husband's child—and all that kind of sentimental twaddle which I hate," said the vehement old lady, driving her parasol furiously into the gravel. "But by that time, what with crying and raving, she had brought on a real headache, and when she tried to sit up, she turned giddy and sick; so that impudent Pauline—I should like to box her ears—fairly scolded Imogen out of the room, and I carried her off. She was rather compunctious about coming then; but I insisted, and I think her compunctions soon evaporated. Now, do tell me, my dear—I have been telling you all my story—is there really anything between them?"

"Anybody can see that my nephew admires Miss Moville very much," I responded discreetly; "but then any man must do that—she is so striking and interesting. As for anything further, I have never seen them together before, so how can I judge? When I was young, I used to be very romantic for other people, and I was always fancy-

ing love affairs ; but I see so many flirtations which mean nothing and come to nothing, that now I have grown cynical."

"That's true," asserted Lady Jacobs ; "and then Imogen is one of those clever girls that men like talking to when they meet, because they are sure that they won't be bored, and they do to fill up their time with, until they meet the other woman whom they are going to marry. For my part, I tell Constantia that she had better let her marry whoever she likes ; or, with all her beauty and her cleverness, she may find her left an old maid on her hands at last. It's my belief, though I know you won't let it go any further," she said, nodding mysteriously, "that if she has had one proposal, it's as much as she had in her two seasons. She has a touch of sarcasm that often militates against matrimony."

This oracular dictum was a fitting close to our conversation, and I turned my attention to my other guests.

Later in the afternoon, I saw Archibald put Miss Moville into a little skiff which was moored below the garden, and row away up the river ; so I knew that all was going well. People began to say good-bye, and they had not yet returned. Neither Lady Jacobs nor I wondered or disapproved ; in fact, that faithless chaperon seemed rather to enjoy her state of desertion. Mrs. Minton and Lucilla lingered to the last, both most obviously out of temper. The mother tried to keep up a fitful conversation with me ; the daughter made herself disagreeable to Lady Jacobs. At last they could not stand it any longer, and Lucilla said crossly :

"Really, mamma, we ought to say good night. It is not fair to keep Mrs. Singleton up to her work any longer."

"It is scarcely night yet, Lucilla," I rejoined ; "and I find entertaining my friends very easy work, if it can be called work at all. Will you take a cup of fresh tea, Mrs. Minton ? "

"Oh, no, thank you, I must go. Lucilla is right ; it would *really* be unconscionable to keep you a moment longer, you look so tired already : besides, we dine at seven. I was only waiting in hopes of seeing Miss Moville again, to give her a message for dear Lady Anderton ; but there seems no prospect of her return. I *hope* no accident has happened, I am always so nervous about those horrid boats, and gentlemen are so careless, I would not let Lucilla go on the water in that way on any account."

I recalled a good deal of unsuccessful manœuvring on that young lady's part to induce Archie to take her for a row, but held my tongue, and let Lady Jacobs take up the cudgels.

"It is very good of you to be so anxious about my charge, Mrs. Minton ; but I am quite satisfied that she will be taken care of. And if you have any message for Lady Anderton, I am sorry that it should have delayed you ; for I shall see her this evening as well as Miss Moville, and I shall be glad to deliver it."

"Oh ! it was only to tell her that I had not the least idea she was

in the neighbourhood, or I should have called on her at once. And please tell her that I hope to see her next week, and I do trust her poor head will soon be well. Good-bye, Mrs. Singleton, it has been a delightful afternoon. I do hope to hear that Miss Moville has come back safe; I shall be quite anxious until I see her again."

"Did ever woman manage to say so many disagreeable things at a time?" I said, laughing, but vexed, as they rustled away.

"I know what her tender anxiety means," responded my friend, "if she once gets at Constantia. She'll come fussing along on Monday, and if she sets foot within my doors, my name is not Belinda Jacobs. But now, my dear, I know you want to let your servants clear up, and put things straight. Don't mind me; I'll just sit quiet here till Imogen comes back. The row will do her good, poor child."

"If you were not late diners, I should ask if you could not stay on, as Lady Anderton is laid up, and share my serious tea and evening repose, after what Mrs. Minton considers the exhausting labour of entertaining her."

"Well, as it happens, I did say to Imogen that we would make our dinner at luncheon-time, and so be free about coming back. I'll let her have a good holiday while she is about it, poor child; she'll be sure to get a scolding when she goes home, and she may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb."

A little dark spot appeared in the golden pool which lay up the river, and as it came on, swelling and changing shape, grew into Archie's boat. He was scarcely helping the current with his oars, anxious to spin out the moments which were slipping by so fast; but the inexorable river brought them to the landing-place, and I caught the look of dreamy peace on Imogen's face, before it was changed to startled blushes at the sight of the deserted lawn. I cut short her apologies with the information that she was still my prisoner; and after a faint remonstrance about "mamma," stifled by Lady Jacobs' authoritative assurance that she was asleep, she dutifully accepted the arrangement made by her chaperon.

That was a bright evening. We were as pleasant a quartette as could be found. Nobody made unpleasant allusions, but everything was taken for granted. In spite of cake and ices, we were all hungry; in spite of an afternoon of talk, we were all sociable. Archie related where they had rowed to, and Imogen told what they had seen, and praised our soft river scenery.

"I think," she said, "there never was a fitter adjective than the *silver* Thames. There is such a wonderful silvery shimmer about it; you do not know whether it is in the water, or the willows, or the air—but it is like no other river."

"Yes," said Archie, "and it is always there. In sunshine and under cloud, the effect is never quite lost; the Naiad of the river ever draws round her some fragments of her veil of soft mystery."

"I don't like anything so unreal as a Naiad for our homely river,"

Imogen answered, "it is too essentially English. I think that *Father* Thames is quite a misnomer. To my fancy the river seems mother-like, as if it would draw me home to it to rest."

"As it has drawn many a poor hunted creature," muttered Lady Jacobs.

"These are gloomy thoughts," said Archie gently; "they are not fitted for to-night."

"No, indeed," I interposed with indignation, "especially when nothing is ever drowned at Tamston worse than a cat or dog."

"Well," Imogen laughed, merrily, "I am quite willing to enjoy the top of your river, without any arrière-pensée of the bottom; but Mr. Rintoul would not let me have my own way to-day at all. I wanted to take an oar, but he insisted on doing all the work himself."

"You know how to row, then?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. I can manage a canoe, too; I learnt when I was staying with my cousins in Scotland. There is quite a good-sized lake in their place, and we used to have such fun on it."

"May I ask, can you swim?" inquired Archie.

"No, I am sorry to say; somehow there has always been something to interfere with my learning."

"Then I must say that I wish there had been something to interfere with your learning the other accomplishment."

"Oh, I am not at all afraid. I have never been upset yet; and if I were, I should hold on to the canoe until somebody came to take me off."

Archie looked grave; but we had finished tea, and I proposed that we should go out again. So we sat where he and I had sat the Sunday before, and watched again the evening fade over the river. We had wished for his ladye-love, and here she was; no spell lay on her now. The running water had washed it all away, and the soft light of her beauty shone undimmed by mists. We brought out music-books, and sang with and without them. She began with the old sweet "Loreley," and then she and I sang a couple of Mendelssohn's duets that everyone knows; and we slipped into German "Volkslieder," skimming over a dear old book of mine, and pouncing upon favourites. And then as our spirits rose higher, Archie sang some of the Studentenlieder, and we all joined in the choruses; and it grew dark, so we went indoors to the piano, and there Archie unearthed the Irish melodies, and made Imogen sing, "What the bee is to the flow'ret" with him. The rich sweet soprano and full bass mocked and carolled at each other through the saucy dialogue, and then joined forces in one of the fiercest of the war-songs.

"Really, dear," said Lady Jacobs, "we must be going. The horses have been waiting for ten minutes."

"One song more, Lady Jacobs," cried Archie, "just one, fit to finish off with. Of course you know this, Miss Moville? Auntie,

you can take the second." And he put, "Oh, who will o'er the downs so free?" on the desk.

Imogen flushed high, but it was more with excitement than embarrassment. We were all a little mad that night, I think; and I sat down to the piano, and we sang out merrily:—

"Oh, who will o'er the downs so free,
Oh, who will with me ride?"
Oh, who will up and follow me,
To win a blooming bride?
Her father he has locked the door,
Her mother keeps the key;
But neither bolts nor bars shall part
My own true love from me."

I had one copy of the music; Archibald and Imogen had the other. She sang spiritedly and steadily, with her eyes fixed on the book. He took glances from time to time at her crimson cheek. So did I, and made mistakes.

We came to the end, and then Archie made an audacious variation:

"And neither life nor death shall part
My own true love and me."

He sang it triumphantly, and looked straight into Imogen's face. The blushes burnt up into her eyes, but she lifted them to his, and gave their mute but resolute pledge.

In five minutes more, they were all gone. Lady Jacobs and Imogen were whirling away; Archie was sending messages of incense to tell the stars of his happy love; and I, putting by the music and blowing out the candles, suddenly collapsed after the excitement, and wondered shiveringly to myself—"Are we all fey?"

(*To be concluded.*)

THE MAJOR'S FOIBLE.

I HAD been invited by Charlie Springfield to dine with him and two or three other fellows at a crack restaurant—we will say the Pall Mall or Continental, it is unnecessary to particularise—and it was arranged between us that I should call for him at his bachelor lodgings half an hour before the appointed time.

"Don't be late, Ned," he said. "You will see something worth the trouble."

Well, at half-past seven precisely, the dinner being fixed for eight, I was at Charlie's door, and found him lying at full length on a sofa in his snuggery, puffing away at a meerschaum.

"Not dressed yet?" I said, as I entered the room.

"Plenty of time," he replied, stretching himself lazily. "I dare say you want to know why I asked you to come early? Take a chair, and I'll tell you. Did you ever hear of the Major?"

"What major?"

"Why, his name is Blackadder, but we always call him the Major. He is staying with me for a few days in my little spare room, and is going to dine with us. Do you understand?"

"So far, yes; but you scarcely wanted half an hour to tell me that."

"My dear fellow, I have told you nothing as yet. Do you know the Major?"

"Never heard of him before in my life."

"Ah, that accounts for it. Well, he has a weakness."

"So have most of us, I presume."

"Possibly, but not like his. The long and short of it is, in the course of his wanderings, for he has travelled a good deal since he left the army, he has contracted, among other singular habits, a very deplorable one; an uncontrollable passion for absinthe. To do him justice, he is thoroughly ashamed of his failing, but he can't resist it, and never lets a day pass without swallowing five or six glasses of that abominable stuff before dinner. He smuggled in a bottle yesterday, and I am as certain as I sit here that he is at it already. Now you know why I wished you to be here in time, and you shall judge for yourself if I am wrong in saying that to watch him making excuses to himself for indulging in an extra glass is as good as a farce."

"Doesn't it injure his health?" I asked.

"It would any other man's," replied Charlie, laughing; "but he must be made of cast iron, for he never seems the worse for it. But it is getting late, so come this way and step lightly; and while I dress, you can observe him at your leisure."

So saying, he led the way through a passage terminating in a glass door, on the inside of which hung a curtain. Between its folds I could distinctly see into the interior of the chamber beyond. "I shall be ready as soon as he is," Charlie whispered, and stole away on tiptoe to his dressing-room.

Determined to profit by the opportunity, I applied my eye to the loophole in question, and beheld a stout man with a red face, carefully attired in evening dress, seated at a table on which stood a suspicious-looking bottle, a decanter of water, and a tumbler. He had evidently just finished one glass, and was preparing for a second. Presently, he poured out a liberal portion of the verdant liquid, diluted it with a nicety of calculation that bespoke the connoisseur; and, after allowing it to stand awhile in accordance with the principles laid down by the habitual frequenters of Tortoni, imbibed the contents of the tumbler in a solemn and dignified manner, beguiling the intervals between each gulp with a "cluck" of intense satisfaction. While I was wondering what he would do next, the Major rose abruptly from his chair, and took a few turns about the room, talking to himself as he went in a confidential tone. "Two glasses," I heard him say, "a very fair allowance, and absolutely necessary before such a dinner as we are likely to have. Two glasses, yes, that is sufficient, quite sufficient; a most indispensable precaution; but we must avoid excess; there is not the slightest reason for overstepping the limits of prudence, not the slightest."

During this soliloquy he made now and then a sudden stop, glanced surreptitiously at the bottle on the table, and with a sigh of regret pursued his walk, murmuring repeatedly "Not the slightest." At length, as if moved by some irresistible impulse, he stepped lightly towards the entrance door communicating with the staircase, tapped on it with his knuckles, and then, reseating himself, gave vent to a sonorous "Come in!"

"Ah, Major," he went on in a feigned voice, "I don't disturb you, do I?"

"What, Tarlton, is it you?" exclaimed the Major in his natural tone, rising from his chair, and pretending to welcome the new comer. "Delighted to see you, my dear boy. How did you find me out?"

"I heard you were staying with Springfield, so I thought I might as well look you up, and pay you the two ponies you won of me at Sandown."

"My good fellow, that didn't press in the least; any day would have done, but as you insist"—here he made a feint of pocketing the notes—"and now you are here, let me offer you a glass of absinthe, an admirable specific before dinner."

"You are very good, but I am not in the habit."

"Oh, once in a way it can't hurt you, and mine is excellent."

"Well, just to keep you company."

Thereupon the Major opened a cupboard in the wall, brought out

a second tumbler, and radiant with the success of his manœuvre, filled both glasses in a most workmanlike manner. "A capital stomachic, is it not?" he remarked, after absorbing half the contents of the one nearest him.

"First rate."

"What are you doing with yourself this evening?" continued the host, manifestly in high good humour.

"Willoughby and I dine at the club, and finish off with the 'Barbier.' It's a Patti night, you know, and—(looking at his watch) by Jove I've barely twenty minutes to dress, so I must be on the move."

"Try another glass first," suggested the Major, who had by this time finished his own tumbler, and was well on with that of his invisible guest.

"Not now, thanks; it's as much as I can do to save my distance. Bye bye, Major."

"Au revoir, my dear fellow, au revoir!"

"Charming young man, that," soliloquised the Major, making believe to close the door on the supposed visitor. "Punctual in his payments too. A very good trait, a remarkably good trait," he added, draining his glass and carefully corking up the bottle, preparatory to replacing it in the cupboard. Imagining the farce to be completely played out, I was on the point of quitting my post, when a look of indecision in my red-faced friend's eye stopped me. He had resumed his walk, mechanically humming an air, but evidently struggling hard against temptation. "No, no," he muttered, "not another drop, it would be folly, downright folly." And taking hold of the bottle, he carried it half way to the cupboard, hesitated, and finally deposited it once more on the table. At this juncture he put his hand to his ear as if to listen, and his countenance brightened visibly as he addressed himself in the voice of his quondam visitor.

"Here I am again, Major! You will fancy you are never to get rid of me. The fact is, I have forgotten my opera glass, and must have left it on your table, as I came straight here from Callaghan's, who had been repairing the spring. Ah, I thought so! Here it is, so now I'm off for good."

"Not without another glass of my panacea. You look all the better for the first, and number two will quite set you up."

"No indeed, Major, you must excuse me. I haven't a moment."

"Just one to keep me company, only one; you can't refuse me. There, I knew you wouldn't. Tarlton, my boy, your health."

Here the Major, suiting the action to the word, after disposing of the contents of his tumbler, made a vigorous attack on that of the apocryphal Tarlton; but the effect was no longer the same. "A change came o'er the spirit of his dream;" the relish of the draught was gone, and the remorse of having yielded to the tempter alone remained. Dismissing his visitor in a most unceremonious manner, and solacing himself by heaping on his devoted head such parting

salutations as "intruder" and "insufferable nuisance," he hastily thrust bottle and glasses into the cupboard, locked the door, and put the key in his pocket. This sacrifice accomplished, he appeared more at his ease; and, as I beat a retreat to Charlie's room, was arranging his cravat with a jaunty and self-satisfied air. A few minutes later he joined us, resplendent with well-waxed moustache and immaculate tie; and the ceremony of introduction having been gone through, we started for the place of rendezvous, where two or three friends of our amphitryon were already assembled.

Taking advantage of a pause in the conversation, Charlie, giving me a significant wink, asked the Major if he did not consider a glass of absinthe the correct thing before dinner.

"The very worst thing you can possibly take," replied the individual addressed, shaking his head with profound gravity; "a most pernicious habit!"

"You didn't always think so," slily remarked Springfield.

"My good friend, autres temps, autres mœurs! Never mind what I thought then; I think so now."

"It certainly gives one an appetite," suggested Tommy Prendergast, the youngest of the party.

"Appetite!" exclaimed the Major, feeling, no doubt, his own wax strong within him, and totally oblivious of what he had been saying an instant before: "it makes one ravenous, sir, positively ravenous. After two or—ahem!—three glasses, a man feels as if he had fasted for a twelvemonth. I wish to goodness they would bring up dinner!"

CHARLES HERVEY.

SONNET.

WHEN the soft light of sunset yesterday
Shone through the storied windows, and the air
Was full of angels that were listening there,
From the dim chapel stole my thoughts away.
A low, soft music did the organ play,
And soft sweet voices joined, and rose and fell:
It was an anthem I remembered well,
A music cherished in my heart for aye.
For fifty years ago, sweet wife of mine,
In the old parish church upon the hill,
I heard it first, as softly fell the night:
And there, too, first I saw thy dark eyes shine.
Surely those words were sung for me, and still
Are sung: "At evening-time there shall be light."

A. M. H.

THE GOLD CHAIN.

I.—THE PALACE.

I had the following tale from the mouth of one of the Princes of the House in question. The facts are historical. Let him who can explain them.

BERESFORD CHRISTMAS.

AN old, dark, red pile of brick, all gables and irregularity; jutting out here, drawing in there, with windows of all sizes, and with scarcely two alike, save the nine which gave light to the great reception-hall overlooking the river, upon whose bank the building stood. Such was the Margrave's residence.

It formed one of the sides of a large square. Opposite were the royal stables; to the right the sombre walls of a monastery; while to the left all was open, thus affording an uninterrupted view of the palace gardens, which, though limited in breadth, stretched for a considerable distance along the bank of the river.

Immediately over the great, gloomy entrance was a long, narrow balcony, all in stone and wrought iron, with the royal arms in the centre. From this balcony, which naturally commanded a full view of the square below, the Margrave and his family, attended by the high dignitaries of the Court, were wont to preside at all open-air ceremonies: reviews, enrolments, processions; and, on certain occasions, too, and under particular circumstances, at public executions.

As for the town itself, there is little to be said about it. Narrow, crooked streets with overhanging, gabled houses, dirty and dark; here and there an ill-kept, irregular Place, with a church in the centre, the river with its yellow waters flowing through the midst and spanned by a single bridge, at one extremity of which a grim prison, at the other a scarcely less grim market-place. In short, what you may see in the old part of a score of German towns even at the present day.

Such, rather more than two centuries ago, was the town in which the drama we are about to relate was played.

Standing at the windows of the grand reception-hall, the eye looked down into the palace gardens stretching to a considerable length up the river on the right; while, to the left lay the grounds belonging to the adjacent monastery, just below which, at a slight bend, stood the bridge, with the frowning walls of the prison opposite. The waters as they hurried by washed the very foundation of the grim pile, and not seldom oozed their way through into such of the dungeons—and they were not few—as were situated below their level.

From a boat anyone could have shaken hands through the bars with a prisoner confined in one of the cells on the ground floor, the

windows of which were scarcely above the level of the river; and many a stealthy greeting did the fisherman fling to some pining inmate, as he rowed swiftly past, keeping carefully at the prescribed distance. For the eyes and arms of the sentinels above were sharp, and scant mercy would have been shown to one sympathising with the unhappy wretch pining within the gloom of that dread abode.

Spring was smiling down upon the awakening earth. There was a purple tinge upon the woods, here and there blending with streaks of softest green; the haze slumbered dreamily upon the distant hills. And from among the tall trees of the palace-gardens rose the laughter and accents of merry childhood, while young feet twinkled joyously amid the violet-sprent grass, and light forms flitted down the long avenues, or gleamed forth from the dark clusters of evergreens; now lost to view amid the sombre foliage, now emerging into the bright sunshine, but to disappear the next instant with a shout of glee, or a shriek of mock dismay.

They were four in number, those royal children, three boys and a girl, under the surveillance of a staid nurse, and confided to the guard of two stalwart lackeys, who were standing aloof at a respectful distance, though near enough to be ready with their services at the slightest sign given them by the woman. She, with hands folded upon her lap, was seated upon a bench at the foot of a huge statue of Hercules, which formed one of the ornaments of the garden.

Within the precincts the children were confided exclusively to the care of Brigitte Falk, and a couple of men-servants; while in their walks and drives beyond they were always accompanied by one or more of the ladies or gentlemen holding office at the Court.

Frau Falk had been nine years in the Margrave's household, which she had entered shortly before the birth of the eldest boy. From early girlhood she had served the family of the Margravine, who, when about to become a mother, had asked and obtained permission of her husband to send for Brigitte, and attach her to the expected infant in quality of bonne.

It had cost her no small effort to ask this boon, for she was of a gentle, timid nature, and feared her husband almost as much as she loved him. But with none but strange faces about her, and the hour of her trial at hand, she felt such a yearning for some familiar friend, however humble, of her early days, that she overcame her timidity, and made her request, which was unhesitatingly granted, almost as much to her surprise as pleasure.

For Margrave Maurice did not like to have people from other parts in his household; and here was one who would occupy a position there which could not fail to bring him into, at least, daily contact with her.

But things went on smoothly enough, and Frau Falk became a permanency at the Palace; idolized by the children, beloved by the

Margravine, respected, if not particularly liked, by all, but *dis*liked by the Margrave himself for a reason to be hereafter related.

He was of a stern, reserved nature; a lover of justice, but of justice untempered by mercy; one to whom lenity is laxity. A husband against whose fidelity no word had ever been breathed; a father whose affection for his children none had ever doubted; a prince who did all he could to ensure justice being meted out to his subjects. Added to this, he was scrupulous in the performance of his religious duties, and allowed himself no other relaxation from the fatigues of business than that of hunting; of which he was as extravagantly fond as it was possible for a person of his reserved and unexpansive temperament to be.

There are flowers perfect in form, features faultless in regularity, which fail to please. There are, also, moral characters without blemish that fail to attract. The Margrave's was one of these. He imposed respect; he could not awaken sympathy.

Tired of their play, the royal children had gathered around Brigitte, the girl upon her lap, the eldest boy, Frederick, a gentle, soft-eyed youth, the image of his mother, on the seat beside her, the two younger upon the grass at her feet. They formed a pretty group. The matronly woman in her national costume, the children in their gay dresses, the colossal statue on its rocky pedestal rising grey behind them; the green grass their carpet, the blue sky their canopy; and, at the other end of the lawn, the scarlet liveries of the two lackies standing out in bright relief against a background of close-clipped yew.

"Tell us a story, nurse," said one of the boys, looking up from the grass, and, for the moment, arresting the arrangement of a little nosegay he had been gathering for his mother.

"No, not a story," cried Maurice, the youngest: "I want to hear all about the daws, and what they have to do with us; and why papa was so angry with Frederick yesterday, when he told him that he had tried to shoot one with his new bow and arrow."

"Yes," chimed in Frederick: "tell us all about them; for mamma got quite pale when I asked her, and ——"

"And nurse, too, is quite pale now—just look!" interrupted Marie. "What naughty birds they must be to make everybody ill who talks about them! Am *I* pale now, brother?" And she turned up her fair young face to the youth beside her.

"No, dear, not a bit! It was only your fancy," answered the nurse. "The daws are just like other birds, neither better nor worse, for that matter."

But it had been no childish fancy, for at the first mention of the daws, the woman's face had changed, and a sudden gleam of pain and terror had shot forth from the depths of her deep blue eyes.

"Well, then, if it doesn't make people ill to speak of them, tell us all about it," said Maurice. "It will be so nice to listen to their

history, while we are looking up at them fluttering and wheeling round that old tower of theirs."

They all followed the direction of his eyes as he said this, and, gazing upwards, saw what they had all seen a hundred times before—a moderately high, square tower of grey stone, with walled-up windows, around which countless daws were shrieking and fluttering, chattering and quarrelling. The tower stood at the furthest extremity of the gardens, and had never been used or inhabited within the memory of living man.

Frau Falk cleared her throat, cast a hasty glance around, hemmed once more, and began :

"It's not much of a history after all, and there can be no harm in telling you what the whole country, high and low, far and near, knows. Now, listen. Years and years and years ago, I cannot say how many, there was great sorrow in this land, for the only son of the Margrave lay on what was believed to be his deathbed. The unhappy father was sorely afflicted; for what with wars without and rebellions within, he had had trouble enough ; and now domestic calamity was added. The poor Prince's heart was nigh to breaking. One evening, near sunset, he was sitting at the window of his son's room, sadder than ever, for the young Prince was worse than he had yet been—when he heard the noise of angry voices in the square below. He looked out and saw a poor old woman dressed in rags, whom the guards were driving away amid a shower of ugly mocking words. He called to them to desist, and ordered them to bring up the poor old creature there and then.

"'Take courage, mother,' said the Margrave to her, when she stood trembling before him, 'take courage ! Tell me who you are, and what you want.'

"'Alas ! my lord, I am a lone, miserable creature, with no friend in the wide world save this poor bird.' And here she drew out of her bosom a daw, and held it up before the eyes of the astonished Prince. 'I have tasted neither bite nor sup this blessed day,' she went on, 'and was just begging for a heller or so to buy me some bread, when ——'

"'Enough, my good woman, you need go no further. Take this." And the noble Prince slipped a gold piece into the aged creature's wrinkled hand.

"'May the Almighty reward you ! May His blessings rest upon you and yours !'

"'The Hand of God is heavy upon me just now, alas ! My only child is sick unto death.'

"The old woman gazed earnestly at the Margrave for a moment, drew a step nearer, and raising one hand to Heaven, said, 'Prince, you have shown mercy to one of God's humblest creatures ; He will show mercy to you.'

"She crossed over to the window, muttered some words in an

unknown tongue to the bird, which, with a low caw and a nod of its quaint head, took its flight out into the evening glow. Then, turning once more to the Margrave, she uttered the following:—

"'As long as daws keep building here,
There's nought for royal race to fear.'

"At this moment, the sick boy cried, 'Father! Father!' and the Margrave hurried over to the bedside. When he turned round again, the old woman was gone. Yet none saw her depart; nor could any trace of her ever be discovered."

"Was she a witch?" whispered little Marie in an awed voice as she clung yet closer to Frau Falk.

"Who can tell? She was there for good, anyway. For that night the young Prince rested in unbroken and peaceful sleep. And when he awoke after the sunlight had long lain slumbering upon hillside and slope, all danger was over, and the voice of thankful rejoicing arose from the gladdened populace."

"But the daws, Nurse, the daws?" interrupted Maurice impatiently.

"Listen. That same morning, at early dawn, the Margrave had been awakened by a tap at his bed-room window, and rising to learn what it might be, he had seen the daw sitting upon the sill outside, nodding his head wisely, and seeming to greet him with friendly gravity. Then off he flew, and the Margrave looking after him, saw him direct his flight towards the old tower yonder, where he was welcomed by a whole army of his brethren perched upon the battlements. From that moment they took up their abode there, and if it be the will of God, will never more forsake the place.

"There, that is the whole story; and now you know why the birds are looked upon with respect and cared for."

"And now," said Frederick in his usual quiet tone, "I know why Papa doesn't like *you*, Nurse. For I remember you once killed a daw, and ——"

"Papa not like Nurse!" cried Marie, putting her little arm round her old friend's neck and looking up lovingly into her face.

"Yes," shouted Maurice, as he leaped up to chase a large yellow butterfly which came floating across the green lawn, "I, too, know that papa doesn't like her!" and off he was in full career after the insect.

Frau Falk had flushed and then grown pale; she now said: "Why do you suppose that my gracious master doesn't like me?"

"Because he is always so polite to you," answered Frederick. "Papa is always extra courteous to those he doesn't fancy. I know it. For I once overheard Herr von Hertingshausen say so. You know he is Hofmarschal and so must be right."

Brigitte sighed.

"And then he always speaks to you in a low voice; just as he does to us when we have displeased him."

All further talk was here put an end to by the appearance of the Margrave himself. He came from the direction of the Palace; a tall, stately man richly dressed in the fashion of the day, with a massive gold chain upon his breast, the links of which gleamed in the sunlight as he walked.

Maurice left his butterfly-chase, and rushed across the sward to meet him. He was the only mortal being who ever dared take liberties with the prince, and owed this privilege, partly to his childish boldness, partly to his being after all the favourite child of his father, whose strict sense of justice had often to fight a severe battle with his conscious partiality.

The scarlet lackeys drew themselves up yet more stiffly, and rivalled any soldier on parade. Frau Falk rose from her seat and stood, the three children before her, awaiting the approach of her royal master.

As, with Maurice clinging to his hand, he passed the scarlet menials, they bent like a couple of poppies swayed by the breath of the coming storm. When he had arrived within a certain distance of the children and their nurse, they, one and all, made grave obeisance, which was courteously but equally gravely acknowledged by the Prince. To all, perhaps even to the Margrave himself, a chill seemed to have fallen around. The sun shone on, but his rays appeared to fall less brightly upon grass and flower. The yellow butterfly had floated out of sight. Nothing but the daws remained as before, and they continued shrieking and chattering, circling and quarrelling, as if they and their old square tower were all the world; and as if no sacred royalty, save themselves, had ever existed upon earth.

The Margrave took his seat upon the vacated bench; Maurice without further ceremony scrambled up on his knees, while the others remained standing in silence before him.

The daily questions as to health were put and answered; the usual inquiries as to behaviour and study responded to; and then, with a quiet shake of the hand to the children in turn, and a courteous though slight bend of the head to the nurse, they were dismissed.

And once more young, ringing voices were heard from a distant part of the garden, mingling with the ceaseless cries of the daws as they circled in busy restlessness through the blue ether above their heads.

Maurice had remained, obstinately keeping his seat upon his father's knees, and prattling on about yellow butterflies, his brother and sister, his tutor, his nurse, anything and everything that came into his little curly head. And, as he listened to the childish chatter, the stern Margrave seemed to thaw and almost to feel the cheery influence of the golden sunlight showering down warmth and unfolding the leafy treasures of spring so bountifully around him.

"Oh! papa, what a beautiful chain!" cried the child, eagerly seizing upon the symbol of rule and examining the crowned lion

which hung from the twisted links. "What a beautiful chain!" the child repeated; "do let me put it on." The Margrave answered by taking the royal bauble from his own neck and slipping it over the fair curly head of his favourite.

"Now I am a Margrave!" cried the boy sliding down from his father's knees and marching up and down in mock dignity before him. "Hurrah for Margrave Maurice! and now all these gardens, and the palace, daws and all, are mine. Hurrah! Hurrah!" and up went his little cap into the air, and off he himself went, running hither and thither, in and out among the shrubs, uttering little shouts of triumphant glee, the heavy gold chain and the yellow curls gleaming in the sunlight and seeming to vie with each other in brightness.

And, whilst the child gambolled on there, another personage arrived upon the scene. With a step quicker than it was his wont to use, Herr v. Hertingshausen crossed the lawn, the bearer of tidings summoning the Prince to his cabinet without a moment's delay. Margrave and Minister took their way towards the palace in deep consultation.

For an hour or more the children continued their play in the garden; now rushing up to the nurse who had taken her seat upon a broad stone bench at the walled-up door of the daw's tower; now flying off again in all directions, shouting and laughing, screaming and whirling about over the green earth, as if in envious imitation of the restless birds overhead.

At last Maurice, quite tired out, came and nestled down beside her, and, with his head upon her lap, fell off into such sleep as only the lightheartedness of happy childhood can know.

The hour was a drowsy one, and the scent of the flowers and the low hum of the bees added to its influence. Frau Falk struggled against it with all her might. But, do what she could, sight would wax dim, sounds grow confused and lids close heavily. Once or twice she started from her half-slumber and looked around with widely-opened eyes. Maurice was sleeping peacefully beside her, the scarlet lackeys were at their post, the voices of the children were heard at their play.

Brigitte gazed once more slowly around her. Then again the lids grew heavy, the head nodded, and sank upon her breast. Sleeping boy, scarlet lackeys, playing children, chattering daws, blue sky, flowery grass, all gently blended in strange and ever-changing confusion. Once or twice a half-articulated word struggled over her parted lips. The head sank lower and inclined slightly to one side. Then Brigitte Falk slept, and her slumber was as sound and unbroken as that of the child beside her.

II.—THE PRISON.

It was market day, and never had the crowd been greater, the excitement more intense. Traffic had, for the moment, given place to something of deeper interest than buying and selling. The life of a human creature was trembling in the balance—the doom of a fellow-citizen about to be pronounced.

Every face was turned in the direction of the palace; for it was within those walls that the fiat was to be issued, it was from under that roof that the prisoner would be led forth either to liberty or death. Best of all, it was across that market place that the guards, the jailers and their charge, innocent or guilty, would have to pass on their way back to the prison on the other side of the water.

All the town and half the surrounding country seemed to have gathered there. The narrow street leading from the Palace to the Place was lined with eager faces; the market itself was thronged; the bridge, too, had its double hedge of expectant gazers, reaching even up to the very door of the gloomy prison. By noon all would be decided, and it was already past the half hour.

All spoke in a subdued voice, and, as the minutes sped, words became fewer, until nought but a short whisper from time to time was heard. The immense crowd stood there, motionless, breathless, expectant.

"How long the time seems!" murmured a young peasant girl to her neighbour.

"Somebody else finds it yet longer, believe me," responded a stout farmer's wife, jerking her head in the direction of the palace.

"I wish she'd make haste about it," grumbled an old fisherman. "The sun's hot, and I haven't sold half my wares."

"Shame on you, Schreiber, to be thinking of a few miserable fish when the life of a fellow-creature is at stake!"

"Fellow-creature, indeed! she is no fellow of mine, for not a heller of hers ever found its way into my pouch! Besides, I'm an honest man, though a poor one, and she ——"

"Hush! It's not for you to judge! And then who can tell how it all came about?"

"Who can tell, indeed! Why, it's as clear as daylight! Do you suppose that the chain melted into air? I wish I was as sure of a hundred marks as I am that she stole it!"

"Stole it! Why, of course she did. Wasn't every inch of ground searched—to say nothing of the household?"

"Yes; and where did she get the money from that she sent to her family not a week after the chain was missed?"

"Well, all that's very true; but yet they have no proof, you see."

"What more proof do you want? You'll see they'll condemn her!"

"Do you think so? It'll be a good thing for trade. These things always are. And then there hasn't been an execution for ever so long. How hot it is! I wish I could get a drink of beer!"

"So do I. I'm as dry as a paving stone."

The sun in all its summer splendour was pouring down its rays full upon the expectant multitude.

Twelve! And ere the last vibration had died away in the summer sultriness, the prisoner, Brigitte Falk, in the midst of her guards, stepped forth upon the square.

A breathless silence brooded over the multitude. Every eye was riveted upon the unfortunate culprit; every ear was strained to catch a word or exclamation that might, perchance, fall from her lips in passing. But she moved on in silence in the midst of her armed escort; more like one in a dream than aught else, and showing no sign of emotion, save in the deadly pallor of her countenance and the convulsive grasp with which she clutched the skirt of her black serge dress.

On she passed. The hot sun poured down his cruel rays upon her uncovered head and flashed fiercely upon the burnished weapons borne by the soldiers. On, on, on, through that never-ending sea of human faces, pale and mute as death itself, but with a world of anguish in those fixed and dilated eyes.

And the crowd closed silently behind the slowly-retreating group; then stood motionless once more and gazed. It was only when the last flash of the halbards, as they turned the angle of the grim monastery, was seen, that those near the palace found their voices. An ominous whisper passed from mouth to mouth. Onwards it crept, spreading right and left, always swifter and swifter, reaching to the prison gate itself just as the black dress and the flashing weapons disappeared within its jaws.

"To be beheaded!" exclaimed one, a little louder than the rest.

"Is it possible? Why, after all, she is only one of us!"

"Yes; but you see she has lived all her life with princes; and that makes a wonderful difference!"

"It's not justice, I say. My aunt has lived as kitchen help all her life at the palace, and if she were to thieve a chain to-morrow, they'd find her a hempen cord quick enough, I'll warrant. No, no, it isn't fair, I say."

But gradually, the first great excitement over, things subsided into something like their usual state, and an hour or so later, people were haggling over gooseberries and homespun, with as much greedy energy as if no such being as Brigitte Falk had ever existed.

The setting sun had withdrawn his last, long, slanting ray from the prison windows, and a sudden gloom had fallen over the grim pile. And as the darkness fell, silence too gathered over the city. Only here and there a light twinkled out from some solitary window

perched high up in its quaint gable. Only here and there a voice rose up from out some tortuous street to die away once more in the dimness of night.

Within the prison all was wrapped in obscurity. Not a sound was heard but the measured tread of the sentinel and the splash of the fishes in the river below.

Brigitte Falk sat there upon her miserable bed, dressed as she was, when, under the blazing sun, she had passed through that sea of curious faces, her hands still convulsively grasping the black serge skirt, pale, rigid, her eyes staring and fixed upon the opposite wall, hearing nothing, seeing nothing; dead to all, save, alas, the bitterness of moral torture.

Deeper and deeper the gloom of night thickened within that narrow prison. Its silent darkness was that of the tomb—a tomb without the peace of the grave; for its inmate was, as yet, numbered among the living. For how long would she be so? Not very long; a few days, a few hours, perhaps. For the justice of those days possessed one merciful quality—that of despatch. The long, lingering agony of modern times was, save in exceptional cases, unknown.

Out from that terrible darkness the shadows of the past came surging up, searing with fresh agony those straining eyeballs, heaping with fiercer torture the heart of the condemned woman as, rigid and motionless as ever, she sat there. Framed in that unfamiliar prison-gloom, a too-well remembered picture rose before her.

A tiny cottage upon the margin of a placid lake, on whose breast the shadow of the wooded hills slumbered in sabbath stillness. An elderly woman came out of the cottage door, looked round the little garden, shading her eyes with her hand, and called: "Brigitte! Brigitte!"

And a young girl started up from behind the currant bushes, where she had been bending over a plot of strawberries, and answered: "Here, Granny." Then, throwing back the two thick plaits of hair, she, with light step, hastened across to the old dame and took one of her wrinkled hands in both her own.

The wonderfully deep violet eyes of that young girl were—strange to say—the same blue orbs which, fixed and staring, were riveted immoveably upon the dark wall opposite the doomed prisoner. The same, yes; but how unlike!

The latch of the gate clicked; a hurried step was heard crunching across the gravel.

"What's the matter, my son?" asked the old woman, as a fine, sturdy man in a forester's dress, came swiftly up towards the porch.

"Oh, mother!" cried he, all out of breath; "the Princess and her two little daughters are down yonder on their way hither. I came upon them not far from the castle woods, and they stopped me, and said they would drink a glass of milk here, and rest awhile, and wait till the carriages came to fetch them. Wasn't it lucky I took

that road? They would else have come upon us quite unawares! Quick, mother, get all things in order. And you, Brigitte, run and put on your Sunday frock. Ah, if your poor mother had but lived to see this day!"

And with a sigh of mingled regret and gratified pride, Rodolf Schwartz set himself to work, in order to be ready to receive his royal guests.

How charming they were, these young princesses, flitting about the garden in their white dresses, eating home-made bread, drinking sweet, frothy milk, declaring they had never yet tasted anything to equal the fresh-churned butter and luscious honey; while their gentle mother sat beside the old woman, talking as kindly, and interesting herself in all the little concerns of the family, as if she had been one of themselves!

Then, after a bright, happy morning, the carriages came, and the royal guests drove off; watched by their gratified and grateful hosts, until the last flush of the red liveries had disappeared among the feathery boughs of the dark pines.

Lake and cottage, forest and spring-tide vanished, and another vision took their place.

The snows of winter lay thick upon the ice-bound earth and the dark branches of the firs bent beneath the glittering burden. There was the clang of bells in the air, and the snatches of solemn, thank-laden chorus floated abroad upon the stillness of night.

In the great hall of the palace all was warmth and brightness. Tables were spread with presents—none, not even the humblest, was forgotten—and the royal household, from highest to lowest, was assembled there to wish the reigning family a happy New Year.

There, too, was Brigitte Schwartz. Save that her dress was somewhat less simple, she was unchanged,and looked as she had looked that spring morning when, waiting upon the gentle princess and her young daughters, her modest manners and singular beauty had won their hearts.

She had been some months under that palace roof, and was now the playmate and humble companion of the two young girls. She had been taught embroidery; and the Oberhofmarschalin had deigned to give her lessons in deportment. She had profited by the teaching, and felt herself happy and contented in her new sphere.

With inborn grace and humble self-possession she, in her turn, brought her wishes to the feet of her royal patrons, and received her gifts from their hands with modest thankfulness. And, when the long ceremonial at last came to a close, and when the merry dance, in which all took part, began, whose eyes so bright, whose step so light, as hers?

She was the chosen partner of a handsome young Hofjäger: and when all was over, and the royal family had retired, when the lights had burned down, and the torches lay black and dead upon the

ground, she closed the door of her little sleeping-room, but without shutting out the image of those dark, admiring eyes, whose earnest gaze had so strangely penetrated to the depths of her young heart.

A spasm of deadly anguish shot through the frame of the wretched prisoner. She shivered from head to foot, and the clutch of her hand upon the black serge tightened. A low mocking laugh seemed to float around her, and for one instant those over-strained eyes closed convulsively. When they opened again, wider even that before, a fresh picture was smiling yet more cruelly upon her from out that horrible darkness, and the demon laughter sounded yet closer to her tortured ear.

Brigitte Schwartz, some few years older, stood before the altar with the handsome young jäger. The mellow light fell soft and warm upon her bridal dress, and chequers of colour from the painted windows were fitfully flung upon the marble pavement. The floating fumes of incense rose and mingled, in undulating waves, with the soaring harmony of the organ. The priest stood there in his imposing robes, and his words of fatherly exhortation resounded among the lofty stone columns of the venerable edifice. Then came the breath of prayer, and the hearts of all were lifted up in supplication before the throne of God.

The next picture formed itself with uncertain difficulty.

Here a figure loomed dimly forth for a moment, and then vanished —the black vaporous waves seemed to undulate, swaying hither and thither, now receding, now approaching, swallowing up and blotting out each other, struggling vainly to fashion forth a vision, unwearying in very weariness, undefinable as the dark flood in the fathomless caves of ocean.

Their motion grew less rapid—the confusion gradually subsided, and the coming picture floated slowly up from the black depths.

The bride of a month sat there, motionless, tearless, beside the blood-stained corpse of her young husband. The woodmen who had carried him home with a marauder's arrow in his broad breast, stood at the doorway of the cottage, looking on in mute commiseration at a grief which they could understand, but not assuage.

Other visions passed in rapid succession; but none so distinct as the early ones. Each successive picture was fleeter than the one going before, and fainter in its shadowing forth.

One alone glared out with something of the early clearness, and lingered with somewhat of the former duration.

Brigitte Falk, an elderly woman, stood at the window of her room in the Margrave's palace, a dead linnet lying before her and a strangled daw in her hand. The Margrave entered.

Paling with fury, he walked straight up to the culprit, and shaking her by the shoulder, asked, in a voice hoarse with repressed rage: "What is the meaning of this?"

"It killed my linnet, and I caught it struggling to free itself from the bars of the cage in which it had got entangled. Pardon me, I am passionate by nature. Pardon me."

"Did you know that the daws were held sacred here?"

"I did."

"And yet you dared?"

"Passion dares all."

"I pardon you for your boldness." And without further word he left the room.

This was the last vision that showed itself distinctly. Those that followed were blended together in inestimable confusion. Only once out from the ever-looming darkness floated the white-robed figure of the Margravine, pale and sad, pleading anguish upon every feature, the delicate hands clasped and held out in agonised entreaty. *What did it mean?* She, too, melted away in the gloom, and the golden-haired Maurice appeared in her stead, the fatal chain gleaming from his neck. Then came seekers for the missing jewel; and by slow degrees they gathered into whispering groups, all pointing with raised forefinger at the spell-bound prisoner, some in menace, most in scorn, a very few in pity.

A strange, awful sound arose within those tortured ears. A booming and seething as of mighty distant waters. Ever and anon the ominous hiss and the mocking laughter were heard through the stunning roar. Hiss and laugh seemed to hover in the thick darkness—now near, now far, far away—now leagues above, now fathoms below; now close to her very ear; now suddenly ceasing and giving place to a silence yet more terrible in its dread expectancy.

And the pointing fingers multiplied and drew near, ever more near, and in their countless multitude they had but one centre—the eyes of the horrified gazer.

For a moment the accusing fingers receded, as the figure of the Margrave, pale and stern, surged up, and pointing to an undefined mass at his feet covered with black velvet, said in a low voice: "Do you know what that is?"

The prisoner tried to force her lips to utter the word "No."

But a power mightier than her will made them say: "*Frederick thy first-born! Frederick thy first-born!*"

What did it mean?

Then in tumultuous crowd arose accusers and judge, guards, soldiers, scriveners, witnesses, populace, all surging around in wild confusion; while the booming and seething increased to hundredfold intensity, and the accusing fingers filled all space, drawing nearer and nearer in menacing myriads, till ——

When, at early dawn, the jailor entered Brigitte Falk's cell, he found her seated on the bed, her head leaned back to the wall, the eyes open and staring, and she herself as cold and unconscious as the bunch of keys hanging at his girdle.

III.—THE PREDICTION.

Ere the stars had faded from the sky, and long, long before the faintest streak in the east had heralded the coming dawn, men, women, and even children, might have been seen hurrying along the various roads and ways leading to the capital. An execution! and the culprit a woman! What a racy excitement to break the monotony of peasant life! It is true she was only to be beheaded—but still!

And on they trudged, singly and in groups; their tongues all wagging with the same theme; their steps all tending towards the one centre. Hundreds reached the town ere sunrise, though all well knew that the tragedy was not to be played out until nine o'clock.

But, although early, the townsmen, and townswomen too, indeed, had been yet earlier, and shown themselves to be quite a match for them in the matter of early rising. A hedge of spectators lined the way from the prison gate to the palace square. If they could not see her die, they could, at least, see her on her way to death. And that, after all, was something to talk about at their future evening gatherings and rustic merry-makings.

The scaffold, covered with black stuff, had been erected at a short distance from the palace portal, and rose to almost a level with the balcony from which the court was to witness the execution.

At half past eight the executioner and his assistants were at their post, and the now awe-stricken multitude stood gazing upon them and their sinister preliminaries with greedy interest and in unbroken silence. At a quarter to nine the prison gate was flung open, and there issued forth a jailor leading, by a straw rope, a wretched-looking horse harnessed to a hurdle covered with a raw hide, upon which the prisoner was seated. Her hands were loosely tied together with a hempen rope, and the sorry equipage was surrounded by an escort of soldiery.

Brigitte Falk was dressed in black. This was the only favour that the Margravine had been able to obtain for her unhappy friend. For the terms of the sentence had been, "dragged to execution in her shift."

The animal dragging the hurdle was but skin and bone, and his pace slow in the extreme. This gave the multitude ample time to gaze their fill, to note every trivial circumstance, mark each involuntary motion, treasure up every particular of the woman's dress and bearing. It was some compensation for the privation of seeing her stripped to her shift by the hands of the jailer in the broad light of day!

Wearily the sorry steed jogged on his way across the bridge, through the teeming market-place, and up the slight ascent leading to the palace square. The progress appeared slow, even To the greedy gazers. What must it have been to the prisoner? that was known only to herself. For, with her hands lying loose in her lap, her head sunk upon her breast, she seemed to take no heed of what was passing, and never once raised her eyes to meet the gaze of the thousands so greedily riveted upon her.

"How guilty she looks!" was the general whisper.

For the unthinking ever associate innocence with self-possession, and consciousness of guilt with confusion. And how often it is just the reverse!

Slowly, ever more slowly, round the Palace Square, between the human hedges, which the soldiery had hard work to keep from closing in and cutting off all further progress, travelled the hurdle; the raw hide now smeared with mud, the garments of the prisoner disordered and stained.

Only once, during all that long and fearful ride, had she given outward token of inward consciousness; and that was when a more than usually violent jolt had caused her skirt to slip up and disclose her naked foot. She bent forwards to re-adjust her dress, and, at that moment, a woman of the crowd stooped to aid her. Their hands met beneath the folds of serge, and Brigitte Falk felt hers warmly pressed. She looked up into the woman's face for one instant, and a glance of heartfelt thanks shot forth from those deep and ever-beautiful eyes. Then, once more, her head sank, and she raised it no more until the hurdle halted at the foot of the scaffold.

At this juncture the Margrave, attended by the chief dignitaries of the court, entered the balcony.

The executioner aided Brigitte to rise, and, still supporting her, made her mount the rough steps of the scaffold. She shrank back as the axe and block met her gaze. She was but a poor peasant woman after all; and neither a fanatic nor a heroine.

The executioner's assistant pushed a rude stool towards her. She sat down mechanically. Intentionally, or by chance, she had turned her back towards the palace. The executioner seized her roughly by the two shoulders, and, by main force, turned her round, stool and all, so as to face the Margrave and his court. She neither resisted nor looked up. Not a murmur fell from her lips.

A robed official advanced to the front of the royal balcony, leaned one of his delicate white hands upon the iron tracery of the balustrade, and, in a loud voice, cried: "Prisoner! if you have aught to say, say it. Your royal master and mine accords you his most gracious permission."

The mob held their breath in excited expectation. For a moment it seemed as if Brigitte Falk had not heard; for she remained motionless as before. But, just as the official had opened his lips to repeat the words, the unhappy woman started from her seat as if impelled by some unseen but irresistible power. Raising her fettered hands high to heaven, and gazing upwards as if the invisible world there had been suddenly revealed to her sight, she stood for a moment in ecstatic silence, motionless, as if turned to stone.

Then a sudden thrill passed through her whole frame, her dark form seemed to dilate and loom down upon the upturned faces of the wrapt multitude, like that of a sibyl upon expectant, awe-stricken

gazers. Slowly she lowered her fettered hands till they pointed full to the face of the spell-bound Margrave, and, fixing her eyes undauntedly upon him, with a terrible meaning flashing forth from out their blue depths, she said, in a voice which rang out loud and clear as the note of a trumpet:—

"By the living God above me, by the Saviour whom men, cruel as yourself, put to torture and death, I am innocent. I neither crave nor desire mercy; mercy exists not for such as you; and my death shall be your punishment. Hear me! On this scaffold, in the face of Heaven, in the presence of all—" here she gazed round upon the multitude beneath her—"I call upon God to bear testimony to my innocence. And God will hear me. God has heard me—for He is not hard and merciless as you.

"Again I say, listen!

"And ye also, ye who are here to see an innocent woman suffer, listen to the words of a dying wretch; treasure them up and repeat them to your little ones.

"*Margrave, from this hour no first born of your race shall ever mount the throne of his fathers.*"

The hands sank, the eyes fell, and she who the moment before had swayed all to silence like an inspired prophetess, was once again the weak, helpless woman who would have fallen to the ground if the executioner had not caught her in his arms.

But as he did so, and almost ere the ringing voice had ceased to vibrate, a piercing shriek echoed from an upper window of the palace, and for a second a vision was seen of a pale, anguish-stricken woman with clasped hands outstretched, as if to sue for mercy. Her eldest born, Frederick, had fallen from the window, and lay dead upon the pavement.

"The Margravine!" was whispered from mouth to mouth, and every face was upturned towards the window whence the cry had issued. But nothing was to be seen there save the portly form of the Oberhofmarschalin and the crimson drapery. The mob, somewhat disappointed, turned towards the scaffold once more.

Brigitte Falk alone had not looked up as the shriek rang forth. And yet she had seen. She began to tremble in every limb, and, raising her bound hands to her face, hid her eyes behind them. She knew it was the vision she had seen in her prison on the night of her condemnation. Like a chain drawn up link by link from some mysterious depth, the memory of that hour returned to her. She now knew what the pall covering that unseen horror at the Margrave's feet should signify. Yes! she was innocent, and God would declare her innocence! And firm in that belief she laid her head upon the block.

Reader: since the reign of Maurice, Margrave of Hessia, who condemned Brigitte Falk to death, no first born has ever mounted the throne of his fathers. You may read it in history.

THE OPIUM POPPY.

THE native country of the Poppy is unknown: its history is obscure; but it is an inhabitant of many warm, and some temperate climates, and there is a curious theory held about it by the botanists of the eastern borders of Scotland, that it was imbedded in the gravel knolls which were deposited at the end of the glacial epoch, and that the seeds of primæval crops there lay dormant, until the hillsides being cut through for engineering purposes, they were again brought within the influence of vivifying agents. At all events, seeds of the poppy, buried for years, have been known to remain fruitful; and every traveller in that district may remark for himself that the sides of the railway cuttings between Tweedmouth and Kelso are literally clothed in scarlet.

There the provincial name is *Cocheno*, from *Coch*, Celtic for red, which would of itself denote a far-distant antiquity.

Our own familiar Corn-rose is an annual found in fields, and sometimes in barren and waste places, during the summer months. It is, however, especially a plant of cultivation; and the ruthless plough that turns it upside down, and the wild winds that scatter the petals and bow down the heads, would appear to be, like the poet's view of afflictions, "but blessings in disguise."

It is our only really scarlet wild flower, and many attempts have been made to utilise it as a dye, but hitherto without success, the brilliant hue being too delicate and too fugitive.

It may be noticed that, according to the doctrine of signatures, which must always possess a singular interest to the inquirer, the Poppy is good for all diseases of the head, as its crown somewhat represents the head and brain of man.

An old herbalist thus writes:—"Nature, methinks, does seem to hint some very notable virtue or excellence in this plant, from the curiosity it has bestowed on it. First, in its flower: it is of the very highest scarlet dye, which is indeed the prime and chiefest colour, and has been, in all ages of the world, most highly esteemed. Next, it has as much curiosity showed also in the husk or case of the seed as any one plant I have yet met withal. Thirdly, the very seeds themselves the microscope discovers to be very curiously-shaped bodies. And, lastly, Nature has taken such abundant care for the propagation of it, that one single seed, grown into a plant, is capable of bringing some hundred thousand seeds."

Linnæus says that 30,000 seeds have been counted in the head of a single red Poppy.

In very early times the flower was held in high esteem: the ancients, regarding sleep as the great physician and consoler, crowned

their statues of Somnus with a garland of Poppies; it was dedicated to the rich and beneficent Ceres; poets sang of its beauty; philosophers extolled its mysterious power.

Theocritus mentions it as a love charm. Chiefly used as a medicine in our own country, it is valued as a narcotic indulgence by almost all other nations, and the quantity consumed in the East is said to be so immense that a statement of the amount would appear quite incredible. Here it is evidently on the increase. It is chiefly cultivated in Europe and Asia, but is also grown in Australia. Large quantities of it are raised at Mitcham, in Surrey, but our uncertain climate must prevent our ever being able to grow it profitably, although British Opium has been found to contain more Morphine (its most valuable constituent) than the opium of commerce.

In the South of France, and Germany, the experiment might be more successful, for it would appear that it is not mere heat of climate which causes the juice of the ripening capsules to be rich in Morphine; and the poppy cultivated for its seed, affording a valuable oil, may be so treated as to yield a harvest of opium, at an expense which need not exceed one fourth of the market value of the drug obtained, whilst the seed can ripen uninjured by the incisions made in the seed vessels. Warmth and dryness are necessary to the setting of the juice, which shall be of a reddish colour, a waxy lustre and a strong disagreeable scent. The best opium is procured during the North West, or dry winds, and the worst during the moist, or East North East, when the drug imbibes moisture, and a watery, bad solution collects in cavities of its substance called *passewa*, according to the absence of which the opium is generally prized.

In India the poppy is grown in large fields, said to resemble carpets of dark green velvet, or a green lake studded with waterlilies. It flowers in January, and the capsules are nearly ripe early in March, when incisions are made in them downwards, with a small knife consisting of three or four minute blades fastened together: the milky juice which exudes is allowed to thicken and dry for four and twenty hours, and is then scraped off. The greatest yield of good opium in our Indian possessions is stated to be 41 lbs. per imperial acre, and the average to be 20 to 25 lbs. Dr. Hooker's description of his visit to the Opium Godowns (stores) will be found interesting.

"At the end of March the opium jars arrive at the stores by water and land, and continue accumulating for some weeks. Every jar is labelled and stowed in a proper place, separately tested with extreme accuracy, and valued. When the whole quantity has been received, the contents of all the jars are thrown into great vats, occupying a very large building, whence the mass is distributed to be made into balls for the markets. This operation is carried on in a long, paved room, where every man is ticketed, and many overseers are stationed to see that the work is properly conducted.

"Each workman sits on a stool, with a double stage and a tray before

him; on the top stage is a tin basin, containing opium sufficient for three balls; in the lower, another basin holding water. In the tray stands a brass hemispherical cup, in which the ball is worked. To the man's right hand is another tray, with two compartments, one containing thin pancakes of poppy petals, the other a cupful of sticky opium water, made from refuse opium. The man takes a brass cup and places a pancake at the bottom, smears it with opium water, and with many plies makes a coat for the opium. Of this he takes about one-third of the mass before him, puts it inside the petals, and agglutinates many other coats over it; the balls are again weighed, and reduced or increased to a certain weight, if necessary. At the day's end each man takes his work to a rack with numbered compartments, and deposits it in that which answers to his own number; thence the balls (each being put in a clay cup), are carried to an enormous drying room, where they are exposed in tiers, and constantly examined and turned to prevent their being attacked by weevils, which are very prevalent during the moist winds; little boys creeping along the racks all day for this purpose. When dry, the balls are packed in two layers of six each, in chests, with the stalks, dried leaves, and capsules of the plant, and sent down to Calcutta.

"A little opium is prepared of very fine quality for the Government Hospitals, and some for general sale in India; but the proportion is trifling, and such is made up into square cakes.

"A good workman will prepare from thirty to fifty balls a day, the total produce being from 10,000 to 12,000 a day. During one season, 1,353,000 balls are manufactured for the Chinese market alone. The poppy petal cakes, each about a foot radius, are made in the fields by women, by the simple operation of pressing the fresh petals together. They are brought in large baskets, and purchased at the commencement of the season.

"The liquor with which the pancakes are agglutinated together by the ball-makers, and worked into balls, is merely thickened opium-water, the water for which is derived from the condemned opium, *passewa*, the washing of the utensils and of the workmen, everyone of whom is nightly laved before he leaves the establishment. Thus not a particle of opium is lost. To encourage the farmers, the refuse stalks, leaves, and heads are bought up to pack the balls with."

Indian opium is thought inferior to Turkish, and, owing to peculiarities of climate, will probably always remain so. It never yields more than five per cent. morphia, whence its inferiority; but it is as good in other respects, and even richer in nicotine.

As a narcotic indulgence, opium is taken in three different ways: in tinctures, such as our common laudanum, or smoked in pipes, or swallowed in pills. It is in the latter form that it is taken in Turkey and France; whilst the Chinese prepare it for smoking by extracting all that water will dissolve, which is generally from one-half to three-fourths of the whole weight.

The dissolved extract is evaporated to dryness, and then made into very small pills, one of which is put into the pipe at a time, and a series of puffs are inhaled till the necessary dose has been taken. In Borneo, Sumatra and Java, the extract, whilst still liquid, is mixed with finely-chopped tobacco and betel.

But the effects of these different preparations are nearly the same—depending, of course, on the quantity consumed, and the health and mode of life of the consumer. In moderate doses, the mind becomes exhilarated, the ideas flow more quickly, and a pleasurable condition is experienced which it is not easy to describe. De Quincy's "Confessions" will be recollected. Having at first found relief from the drug for the agonies of neuralgia, he thought that he had discovered a panacea for all human woes; the true secret of happiness, about which philosophers had so long disputed—happiness which might be bought for a penny, and carried in the waistcoat-pocket; portable ecstasies might be had corked up in a pint bottle; and peace of mind could be sent in gallons by the mail-coach.

These were the opium-eater's first beliefs; but by degrees the drug lost its stimulating effects; beatific intoxication was no longer produced. Torpor and misery succeeded. He, however, affirmed to the last that, if a comparison is to be made between the effects of Opium and Alcohol, it must be admitted to be in favour of the former; and this very poor praise is, perhaps, the most that can be said in favour of opium-eating.

Coleridge, who had been almost bedridden for months, was recommended laudanum, and it acted like a charm; but it taught him to become the slave of opium, and though he lived to conquer the evil habit, it was at the expense of mental and bodily tortures, and he came out, in his own words, "agitated, writhing, throbbing, palpitating, shattered." Similar effects are described as resulting from the smoking of opium in China.

Some remarkable evidence has been collected regarding the prevalence of opium-eating amongst the poor in the East-end of London, where it is a merciful support in starvation and its consequent evils, affording a strong proof of the impunity with which it may be used; but it should never be forgotten that it is a dangerous indulgence; that it cannot be left off at will; that the habit, once contracted, clings to its victim with more pertinacity than almost any other evil habit, and that in course of time it is sure to substitute torture for its first pleasurable effects. But its medical value is not to be overrated.

"By pain and sorrow blest," it is the sheet-anchor of the physician, and to him alone, in his deep sympathy and his judicious care, should the dread agent of unimaginable pleasure and pain be entrusted.

C. E. MEETKERKE.

MY FIRST FEE.

I.

I FEAR I am not saying anything very original when I mention that my father was a poor clergyman. There are hundreds of poor clergy, naturally their sons can be reckoned by thousands. I know there were thirteen of us, and how we all managed to find standing room in our small North country vicarage seems a marvel to me, when I look back upon that time of growing up. And then the struggle to settle the professions of eight sons! Mine was, however, soon fixed upon. My aunt's husband, a Scotchman, and an M.D. in a country town, said he would bring me up to his own profession, provided I eventually became his partner, and in this manner repaid him the cost of my education.

The proposal sounded well; anyhow, it was accepted. But, ah! the realisation was different. He never praised me when I worked myself almost to death in order to pass brilliant examinations, and only grunted when at last I came to settle down with him in a desperately dull town, after having come out first on the list at Edinburgh.

My uncle cared nought for my being Arthur Merrifield, M.D. I was to be his white slave, and repay, with hard labour, what he had spent on me. I honestly tried my best to please him, the practice increased considerably, but time went on, and still my uncle never spoke a word about money affairs. I was more than a partner as to work, but no partner at all as to pay.

And yet I felt that I could make a name, also a fortune, if only I could get a fair chance. And the five girls at home were expecting grand things of me, which looked as if they might never be realised, for even if I persevered till my uncle died, and left me his practice, I might by that time have become grey with age, and unable to begin to make my way.

At last I could bear it no longer, and one day I determined to come to an understanding with him. I am sorry to say this ended in a regular quarrel, and I declared I would seek my fortunes in London. My uncle called me all sorts of names, which, as they were the reverse of complimentary, I will not repeat, and I respectfully disagreed with him. His last words were:

"I should like to know, sir, how *you* are going to find a patient in London?" I did not answer him, for I was perfectly unable to do so, but I had courage and perseverance. "Where there's a will, there's a way," I thought, and thus I left my uncle's house, knowing well enough that I should never see a penny of his money.

I will pass over the many difficulties I next encountered; the

applause of the other twelve as to my conduct, and the regrets of my father, who had fancied I, at least, was off his mind; and lastly, the difficulty of finding anyone to lend me some money wherewith to make a start. I meant to begin at once in good style; nothing venture, nothing have; and I was determined to have one of the best practices in town.

At last a part of my dream was realised. But yet it was all very well to be the occupant of a respectable-looking house in a quiet London square; to have gone to the expense of a brass plate on which was neatly engraved "Dr. Arthur Merrifield;" further to have engaged a worthy, middle-aged female to answer the door, if the door-bell had ever been rung and the master inquired for. Alas! I was beginning to feel depressed in mind because no patient appeared, and no fees filled my pockets.

I had told the five girls at home that my house would soon be besieged at all hours of the day and night. I had even had a night-bell attached, which rung in a deafening manner close to my ears, as I lay in bed; and, best of all, I had contrived a peep-hole through my window-shutter, in order to distinguish the rank of the visitor who disturbed my slumbers. But up till now, I had slept peacefully night after night, and I might have slept all day if I had so wished it, for no patients had come to ask me to cure them.

"And yet," I thought, as I paced the floor of my consulting room, where no consultation had ever taken place, "and yet that rich young Jones promised that he would recommend me to the first of his relations who fell ill. The constitution of the Jones family must be terribly good, for I am sure the fellow meant what he said; he is good nature itself. Perhaps I have been a fool after all, and I had better have stayed with my uncle, where at least my food cost nothing!"

You must understand that my spirits had reached far below zero to be able, even in my most private thoughts, to wonder anything of the kind. And, curiously enough, it was at this very moment that my front door bell was suddenly rung in a furious manner. I very nearly rushed out to open the door myself, only I was met by Mrs. Davis, who had run up from below, almost as much excited as I was at this unprecedented event.

"Show the visitor into the consulting room, Mrs. Davis," I whispered, "and say you'll see if I am disengaged."

I retired into a small study next to the consulting room, and separated from it by folding doors. It was here I had my meals, and besides my bed-room, it was at present the only furnished room in the house. But hardly had I closed the door when I recognised the loud jovial tones of "Young Jones," who rather unceremoniously entered my den.

Tom Jones was the son of a rich brewer, and, knowing very well that he would come in for heaps of money, had considered it

would really be waste of time to settle to any profession. He was, however, a good-natured, generous youth, delighted to do a kindness, and with no greater vice than a love of doing nothing useful.

"Hulloa, Merrifield!" he exclaimed, "how are you? Worked to death, I expect, since you set up on your own hook. I've only come to town this very day, but I made a point of hunting you up, as I promised. I came at lunch time, for fear, otherwise, of finding you closeted with some rich hypochondriac."

"I am not very busy just now," I answered, "but delighted to see you at any time."

"Well, how many fees have you taken?" asked the irrepressible Jones. "Of course London is already ringing with your praises." I wished he would talk on some other subject, but truth compelled me to answer, carelessly:

"No, no, not yet, these are early days; the truth is, I have very few patients. To be quite open with you, my dear fellow, you are my first."

Jones jumped up, pulled a face, and then gave his chest a mighty slap, intimating he was perfectly sound in that direction.

"My dear doctor, I wish I could think there was anything the matter with me, but, upon my word, I never felt better in my life. I haven't a pain or an ache about me. However, if the case is as you say, you won't quite despise my news; I fear it is not worth more than a guinea fee, but it may lead to more. My rich old uncle, Jonathan Dillon, is coming to consult you this very afternoon, because I told him you were the very man he wanted, but I just looked in to tell you that he is *very* crotchety, and you must just manage him properly. As to his ailments, I don't believe they are of much consequence, because he has been just the same ever since I was in arms. Never looks a day older."

"I'll do my best, professionally," I said, secretly not much believing this rich man would turn up. "As to *managing* him, I am afraid that is not in my line."

"Well, that's a pity, because if he were to take a fancy to you, you would want no other recommendation. He'll recommend you right and left, and the whole Dillon class are disgustingly rich. And all inherit asthma or bronchitis. Fact."

I began to express my thanks; for in spite of his off-hand manner, I felt sure Jones had taken some trouble about me; but he only laughed at my gratitude.

"Don't mention it. Besides, old Dillon *may* take a dislike to you. However, he mustn't find me here; perhaps he wouldn't believe I had come to consult you, though I did tell him you were the cleverest fellow in London. And so you are, in my opinion; I wouldn't mind telling the Queen as much, if I had the chance." And then he was gone. But no, once more he turned back.

"I say, Merrifield, old Dillon's daughter is sure to come with

him; he never goes out without her; a perfect slave, he makes of that girl!"

It was towards four o'clock on a winter's afternoon, that a carriage and pair dashed up to my door; then a grand footman jumped down from the box and gave the correct announcement of my first patient; I had just time to escape to my den before the front door was opened. I heard voices, then a loud cough, then doors being closed. Yes—my first patient had come. In another moment his card was handed to me, and on it was written:

"Mr. Jonathan Dillon."

II.

I ENTERED the room in my most professional manner, and looking straight before me, at once saw what was unmistakably "old Dillon," but so much wrapped up, that very little more than a quarter of his face was visible. I can honestly say I never noticed Miss Dillon till her father himself waved a small fat hand in her direction, saying:

"My daughter, Dr. Merrifield; she always comes with me wherever I go, for I am so infirm I don't think it safe to be left alone—but *she* enjoys excellent health." This last remark was said in a most deplorable tone, and as I turned, I almost started with surprise, for old Dillon's daughter was a small, delicately-made girl, who could not be much more than seventeen years old. Her forehead was encircled by the most golden hair I had ever seen, and her face though not what could be called extremely beautiful, was yet one of the sweetest I had ever gazed at. The expression was so simple, the large blue eyes were so innocent and shy, that for a moment I was completely lost in wondering how such a man as the one before me had any right to possess such a daughter. Miss Dillon was evidently very retiring, and at this moment also feeling de trop.

"I dare say, Dr. Merrifield," she said hurriedly, blushing up to the roots of her hair, "that there is a room I may sit in whilst you hold your consultation. Papa never likes me to leave him alone a minute, for fear anything should happen. Anywhere will do." I bowed, and rang the bell, saying, in as calm a tone as possible:

"Show Miss Dillon into the study." The vision of fair hair having disappeared, I gave myself up to the examination of my patient. After a careful inquiry I came to a conclusion which made me certain that this was the last time I should see Mr. Dillon. The truth being there was nothing much the matter with him, that the old man was a regular hypochondriac—in fact, that all his ailments were imaginary. But yet, come what might, I must speak the truth; even for the sake of further fees, I must not give a dishonest opinion. I would not be the first of the thirteen to act a lie.

Mr. Dillon now began to give me a minute account of his ailments, and to repeat the advice of various doctors.

"And now, Dr. Merrifield, I feel sure you will agree with me in

thinking it absolutely imperative that I should leave England at once, to cure this troublesome cough."

If only I could have agreed with him; but no.

"Quite the contrary," I said calmly. "I think you should stay in England, the finest and most healthy climate for a constitution like yours."

"Bless me! Bless me!" ejaculated Mr. Dillon, looking distressed. "Do you *really* think so?"

"Without a shadow of doubt, sir."

"But about exercise? I ought to take very little, of course?"

"Not at all; the more you walk, the better it will be for you."

"You are quite unique, sir, in your opinion—remarkable! But about a prescription, doctor. I suppose you will write one for me, to allay this cough, for instance?"

"No," I answered, "any ordinary lozenge will suffice." I knew now I had signed my death warrant; or rather, I thought I knew; for what was my surprise when Mr. Dillon exclaimed:

"My dear sir, you are the first physician who has given me no prescription! I believe you understand my case. I hope I may come and consult you as often as I feel the need of it: which need, I grieve to say, occurs frequently."

I was amazed. Curiously enough, for once the truth had pleased the old man, but now I was obliged to answer:

"I am sure you will find it quite unnecessary to come again, unless some unforseen ——"

"Tut, tut, Dr. Merrifield, not one of my many medical advisers ever told me not to come again. I assure you I *shall* come again, whatever you may say, and many times too; and I hope to send others of the family here. We all have wretched constitutions; all except Lucia; I've often wanted her to see a doctor, but it's no good; the girl never complains, even of headache."

This time I really smiled. "I am sure we doctors are only too glad to see a lady in perfect health. The present excited life which many of them lead ——" but Mr. Dillon was not listening to me, for suddenly he turned round (for he had risen to leave), coughed violently, and then, after a nervous fumbling away the pockets of his great coat, he said:

"Bless me! I had nearly forgotten an important little matter. Believe me, sir, I never gave a fee with greater pleasure or more gratitude." He pressed his fat hand into mine, and I felt a small round thing slipped dexterously into my palm. I then went to release the vision of fair hair from my den, and at once hoped that if Mr. Dillon *did* come again, Miss Lucia would always accompany him. I escorted the pair to the front door, and just as Mr. Dillon had entered the carriage, his daughter made a pretence to run back for a glove.

"Please forgive me, Dr. Merrifield," she said, looking right up into

my face with a most anxious expression on her sweet countenance. "Please forgive me, but what do you *really* think of papa?"

"In excellent health, Miss Dillon; pray don't be anxious." But before she could say any more, her father called her impatiently, and she was gone with just one sweet smile and a "Thank you *so* much," for all the world as if I had just cured her father of some obstinate disease.

And now, clasping my first fee, I returned to my room. There I unclasped my hand, and in the middle of my palm lay a *bright, hard, yellow, ginger lozenge!*

The expectation had been great, and the realisation was so small that I burst out laughing at my own bad luck, and my discomfiture. Yet not for a moment did it enter my head to acquaint my patient with his mistake. I felt sure if I did so, the vision of golden hair would blush with confusion, even though I did not see her, and the blue, truthful eyes would look troubled.

No, my first fee was not worth a guinea, but such as it was, I did not hate it, because—ah, well, I might well call myself a fool for even fancying that I, Arthur Merrifield, penniless and unknown, should, for a moment dream that I had fallen in love at first sight with my rich patient's only daughter.

I put the lozenge away in a box, and that night I again slept the sleep of a feeless physician.

III.

THE next day I found myself thinking of a vision of fair hair, instead of taking in the sense of a clever treatise on the anatomy of the hand, which certainly could in no way be connected with the events of the day before. Curiously enough, however, about eleven o'clock, a cab drove up to the door, and what was my astonishment—I need hardly say pleasure—when Miss Dillon, followed by an elderly maid, made her appearance. There she stood, as fair, and soft and beautiful as the day before, but, if possible, more shy and embarrassed. The little hand she held out to me trembled visibly, as she said:

"Oh, Doctor Merrifield, can you forgive me for disturbing you this morning? I don't know how I made up my mind to come, but I felt I *must*, even if, if ——" She paused, and tears almost came into her blue eyes, whilst I could think of no words suitable enough to set her mind at rest, being ignorant of what she wanted to say.

"Indeed, Miss Dillon, if there is anything I can do for you, I shall be delighted; so I beg you will not apologise for troubling me."

"It isn't that exactly," she answered, once more looking at me in a most distressed manner.

"Perhaps you require further particulars as to your father's health; I must repeat what I said yesterday ——"

"Oh, thank you, it was so kind of you; he was much better last night; I know you will do him good; but that was not what I wanted

to ask you—oh dear! you will think me so rude, or else an impostor, or—or ——"

"Impossible," I said, more vehemently than the case required.

"I don't know how to begin; I mean, perhaps you don't know the peculiar way papa keeps his accounts?"

I was startled at this question. Remembering the yellow lozenge in a box, I thought I could say I did know one of Mr. Dillon's peculiar ways of paying fees; but not for the world would I tell this blushing, shy, bewitching girl before me the truth.

"I don't presume ——" I began.

"Oh no, I am sure you don't—I was going to tell you about it. Papa always makes his confidential man, Baker, put the same change every morning into his pockets, and in the evening, when Baker turns out the pockets, he just puts down in a book what is missing, and makes up the number of the coins the next morning. He does it just the same every morning."

I was getting rather puzzled myself now, and could think of nothing more original to say than:

"Indeed!"

"Yes, it's *quite* true, or you see I shouldn't have known about it." (Here the fair vision blushed still more.) "Baker puts in a sovereign, a half-sovereign, a crown piece—he finds these rather difficult to get sometimes—half-a-crown, a shilling, a sixpence, a fourpenny piece, a threepenny piece, a penny, a halfpenny, and a farthing."

"A very complicated way of keeping one's money, isn't it? or perhaps complicated for Baker," I said, feeling it perfectly impossible to repress a smile, though Miss Dillon's sweet, earnest mouth kept so grave.

"No, it is *quite* simple when one understands, because Baker knows exactly what a sovereign, a half sovereign—and all the rest comes to—I forget what it is—but, oh, Dr. Merrifield! Baker knew we had been yesterday to consult a new physician, and in the evening there was only a threepenny bit and a farthing missing, and so—and so I knew—I mean Baker knew—and he told me that papa must have given you something by mistake. It wasn't the farthing, I can account for that, and—but was it the threepenny piece, or ——?"

"Pray, dear Miss Dillon, don't distress yourself about such a little matter," I said, hastily. "Any time will ——"

"Oh, no, but papa thinks he paid you, because he said to me he never gave a fee with so much pleasure, so now I begin to think he must have—given you ——" Miss Dillon quite gasped, so that I hastened to fill in her pause, this time feeling quite distressed at her trouble.

"Your father gave me a very good ginger lozenge, Miss Dillon; one of those little mistakes which will occur now and then. Pray don't make yourself the least uneasy about it."

"How *very* kind you are," she said, again holding out her hand which I took and forgot to let go till she had done speaking. "I

felt sure it *must* be that, and then I thought perhaps you would think us impostors, and I knew you would be too much of a gentleman to mention it, and so—do you think I was wrong?—I came off with Mrs. Brown this morning, and made up my mind I *would* explain the mistake, only it was so dreadful. But I don't mind now that you look so kind about it. And then would you do me a *great* favour, Dr. Merrifield? Would you mind not appearing to know anything about it, or that I came, or *anything*, because papa doesn't know I am out; he is not down yet; and he would be so distressed, he might never come again, and I should be so sorry, as you suit him exactly."

"Pray don't call this a favour," I said, as gravely as I could. "I think you will believe me when I say that, without even knowing your wishes on the subject, I should never have mentioned the—the lozenge."

"I don't know *how* to thank you! Now I must go." And then Miss Dillon put that small gloved hand into her muff and drew it out again, holding it out towards me once more, and this time I felt a little square bit of paper in my hand. Somehow, our eyes met, and in spite of the gravity of the occasion we both laughed, feeling, I am sure, we should never again be afraid of each other, as she said:

"Please, Dr. Merrifield, don't laugh at me. Is this the right way to give a fee, because I must tell you this is the first time in my life I have ever had to give one. I suppose some day I shall be ill and want a doctor, but I never, never have wanted to go to one before. And it wasn't for myself this time, was it? you will bear witness—I mean, I hope you won't ever mention it: good-bye. Now, Brown, I am ready."

And just as a ray of sunshine sometimes comes into one's room, glimmers, dances and illuminates the place for a time, and then suddenly disappears, so Lucia Dillon had come and gone, and that noisy four-wheeler took off my vision of fair hair, leaving me with a golden sovereign and a new shilling wrapped in a small half sheet of paper, on the top of which was stamped the address of their London house. I folded that piece of paper and put it away in a pocket-book among my treasures, such as my dear mother's first letter to me at school, and the flower that a little girl of seven years old had dropped when I, a nine-year old urchin, had fallen desperately in love with her. There was nothing there unworthy to lie next to the paper which Lucia Dillon's fingers had touched.

Later in the day I received a note from Mr. Dillon, begging me, if I were not too much engaged, to come and see him, as he felt very unwell. And if I would do him the great favour of dining and spending the evening with them, he would be very grateful, for he saw so few people on account of his wretched constitution.

Well, I went, and spent a very happy evening. It was only the first of many more, at least during this first season. But Mr. Dillon was as good as his word; from the day of his first visit my practice slowly

but surely increased, and though there were years of up-hill work, yet it is perfectly true that "ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte." I had at last got a chance, and I seized it. I worked with double energy because at the bottom of my soul I had another object besides the one of making the five girls at home proud of me; I wanted a small, fair, blue-eyed Lucia to be proud of me; and I wanted to be able to lay at her feet all that is best and grandest in this life. But she was a rich man's daughter, and I was a struggling physician.

It was not till I had freed myself of all debt—and though still a poor man I was comparatively rich, for I had a good and increasing practice—that at last I made up my mind to ask Lucia to be my wife. I should not have had the face to do it even then, only a young good-for-nothing aristocrat was perpetually coming to the house, and I knew that if Lucia, so young, simple and innocent, became the wife of that man, her life would be miserable. The fear of this, and *some* amount of jealousy, perhaps, made me speak out one day. I shall never forget Lucia's face when I had said some strong, earnest, passionate words. She put her little hand once more into mine and looked up with her beautiful truthful eyes, as she half sobbed:

"Oh—do you really mean it? Because, somehow, I think I have —loved you ever since ——"

"Ever since you gave me my first fee, my darling," I said, as I drew her beautiful head on my shoulder and—well, never mind the rest. "Well, Lucia," I added, "I loved you the first moment I saw you. So you see I loved you *long* before you cared for me." But Lucia, who is just a little matter-of-fact, shook her head decidedly, and said that *that* was all nonsense.

There was still the question as to what Mr. Dillon would say about it, but our true love, which had had to wait so long, this time ran smoothly. Mr. Dillon, who still suffered from his wretched constitution, was delighted at Lucia's choice, and said all kinds of complimentary things about my rising fame and my other qualities And so we were married, and the five girls from home were bridesmaids, though they soon afterwards married from our house under Lucia's care. And though I often tell Lucia that the last person she should have married was a popular physician, considering she is never ill, yet she always shakes her pretty golden head, and says gravely:

"But, perhaps, Arthur, some of the children *may* inherit papa's wretched constitution."

As to the story of the ginger lozenge, Lucia and I kept that a secret till Mr. Dillon died. He left Lucia all his money—and so ends this true story of My First Fee.



ROBERT BARNES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

THERE WAS AN EXCLAMATION OF SURPRISE, A START BACKWARDS.

THE ARGOSY.

OCTOBER, 1882.

MRS. RAVEN'S TEMPTATION.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "DR. HARDY'S MARRIAGE."

CHAPTER XXXV.

A TELEGRAM FROM THE COURT.

THE shades of the October afternoon had gathered on the Temple when Philip Connell quitted his chambers for Miss Agate's house, arm-in-arm with Frank. The London twilight seemed intolerably thick and sultry after the comparative freshness round the paternal domain of the Connells, even in dirty Coltburn.

The lamp was already lit in Miss Agate's parlour, but the curtains were not yet drawn, and as the cousins drew near the house, they got a full view of the quaint interior. Miss Agate sat at her writing table, her clasped hands lying on a huge volume open before her. She was talking earnestly, yet with that calmness which is always the sign of intensest feeling in women of her type, to her attendant, Mary Davies. Davies was not standing in her usual humble, deprecating attitude, but was sitting in a chair, with bent figure, as if some burden of grief or terror had crushed all ceremony out of her.

"I wonder what is up," whispered Philip as he rang the bell, which was not answered so promptly as usual, and it was Miss Agate herself who opened the door at last. She brought her accustomed bright, yet wistful face to welcome them.

"I am so glad to see you," she said. "Oh, so glad!"

She walked before them into the little parlour, empty then.

"If there has been anything troubling you, Miss Agate," said Philip, "you should have let me know about it at once."

He spoke with simple sincerity. He had a deeper regard for the little lady than she realised. Gertrude Agate never expected anything for herself from anybody.

"It has only happened lately," she answered.

"What is it? Nothing wrong with your brother, I trust?"

"Oh no," she replied. "It is really nothing wrong with anybody, only it is an unaccountable thing, and seems to indicate that some sort of mischief may be brewing somewhere. I think it was incautious of me to tell Davies about it. She has taken it up with so much terror as to quite unnerve me. And I suppose sensible people should be above being frightened by anonymous letters."

"Anonymous letters!" echoed Frank.

Miss Agate turned upon him brightly.

"Yes!" she said. "It's very dreadful, isn't it? But I suppose such things have to be encountered sometimes, like mud and dust. They only began to come three or four days ago. But they come now regularly every morning. And their purport is, that I should take Evelyn from Ravenscourt. They beseech me, appealing to my feelings—they threaten me, appealing to my terrors; but that one thing is always their burden."

"What is their postmark?" asked Philip.

"Each letter has a different one," she answered, "but all date from villages near Ravenstoke. Davies knows all the places."

"I don't like to be suspicious," said Philip, "though human nature generally justifies it: but is it possible that Davies herself has any hand in getting these letters sent to you? She was very fond of Miss Evelyn—is she determined to get her back at any cost? Or, stay! Did you not say that she had once lived in those parts—can she have some idea that Miss Evelyn may hear some story of her past life, which might cause you to part from her?"

Miss Agate shook her head. "I am sure that your last suggestion is groundless," she said. "Mary knows me much too well to dream that I should turn against her for any past story, after her long, harmless years of patient toil beneath my own roof. Besides, she had grown reconciled to Evelyn's absence."

"Can you let me see these letters?" asked Philip.

"Certainly," answered Miss Agate, rising. And Frank noticed that they were not stored among any of her papers, but that she fetched them from a little bag hanging beside the fireplace, in which she usually kept nothing but waste paper. She carried them by the tips of her fingers and dropped them swiftly on the table.

There were three of these letters. Each was on only a half sheet of paper. As Philip read each of them, he passed it on to Frank.

The messages were short enough. The first ran: "As you value the happiness and welfare of your adopted niece, send for her from Ravenscourt."

The second was: "Take a word of advice, or you will rue it. Send for your adopted niece before evil befals her."

"This came this morning," said Miss Agate, as she opened the third. "London is the place for Evelyn Agate. Keep her under your own eye. Beware of any face that may come to your house for the first time at this period."

Each missive was written in the same large, scrawling hand which Philip and Frank had learned to recognise—the horrible caricature of the late Squire's caligraphy. The two young men looked at each other.

"Do you wonder at my alarm?" asked Miss Agate.

Philip had rapidly made up his mind that something must be told.

"We have been growing accustomed to similar mysteries," he said, lightly. "My mother's governess received a letter only the day before we left Coltburn. I must confess that I fear this annoyance is due to an indiscretion committed by myself, Miss Evelyn and my sister. A woman came to our town professing to be a fortune-teller, and we foolishly consulted her. Since then, we have had some unaccountable vexations; and the worst of it is, they have not been confined to us, the real culprits."

"Evelyn never told me a word about all this," said Miss Agate, with a tone of reproach in her voice.

"Why should she?" asked Philip; "there was really nothing to tell. I don't suppose she set much store by her interview with the woman, and Miss Evelyn knew very little of subsequent events, for my father did not choose that a young lady, a guest in his house, should be worried by hearing of this kind of thing."

"Evelyn seemed to enjoy her visit to Coltburn so thoroughly," said Miss Agate. "The only trouble she alluded to, was some alarm of people—burglars, I thought—lurking about the house at night. Do you think that had anything to do with this fortune-telling affair?"

"That we cannot tell," Philip answered, briskly. "That is exactly what we are trying to find out. We have our own suspicions, and have communicated them to the police."

"If this all originates in that fortune-teller," said Miss Agate, "it is probably only a vulgar plot to mystify and defraud. Yet one gets timid. Especially with Mary Davies, weeping and wailing, and declaring that there is a curse over Ravenstoke and ——" she paused, suddenly remembering Frank. So she broke off with a question:

"Do you really think I need not be afraid?"

Frank blushed to the forehead. Thinking constantly over these mysteries, he was beginning to see a certain method in them. He did not forget the message that had been found with the buried gold, nor yet the witch's hints during his personal interview with her.

"I don't think there is any fear," he said, hesitatingly. "The anonymous letter to—my aunt's governess, was in much the same strain. She had happened to pass through Ravenstoke once, and had seen a figure, which it appears passes for our family ghost. The letter warned her that such a sight boded special ill to anybody not of the Raven race."

Miss Agate mused. "That same cry of danger at Raven!" she said. "And, of course, Evelyn is not of the Raven race. But then you don't believe in the ghost at all, Mr. Raven, do you?"

"It seems there can be no mistake about the appearance of a

mysterious figure of some sort," answered Frank. "As to its being a ghost, I think I have not quite made up my mind. Of course, one doesn't believe in such things in a general way, and yet——"

"One generally has one's own ghost story that one does believe," chimed in Philip.

"Can there be anybody at Raven who could find it to their interest to get Evelyn withdrawn?" mused Miss Agate, "anybody who may have been carrying on little peculations, which the presence of an active and acute young lady might check? What do you think of that suggestion, Mr. Raven?"

"Oh no," cried Frank, warmly, "the servants are all old servants, who could be trusted with untold gold."

"Possibly better than with carefully counted gold," said Philip, drily. But the sarcasm fell unnoticed, for there came a sharp, hurried knocking on the wall of the room.

Miss Agate rose hastily. "It is only my poor brother," she said. "I will go and tell him that I will be with him in a few minutes."

She went out and came back hastily. The gentlemen had risen.

"No, no," she said. "My brother only wants to speak with me, and I will go to him presently. I can't let you go without consulting you definitely. You really do not think I should send for Evelyn? It seems like an insult to your family to ask such a question," she added, turning to Frank. "I should be sorry to send for her. Evelyn seems so thoroughly happy. Each letter is brighter than the last. What have I to offer her in exchange for all she has there? But, then, this mysterious snake—this spy—this traitor—hidden somewhere in the grass! And this story of the baleful ghost! Evelyn wrote something about it once, but I took it to be merely some old wives' tale. And she has alluded to it again in the letter I had last."

"Ah, you promised to read us that letter," said Philip, interested.

"So I will," answered Gertrude Agate, drawing it from her pocket.

But she could not hand them Evelyn's letter to read, because there were sundry phrases disparaging to Mrs. Raven and Leonard. She had judiciously to choose extracts.

"Everything here is very beautiful just now. The nights are frosty already, but the days are bright and fair. Mrs. Raven has had some new damask put on the drawing-room furniture—splendid stuff, which cost, I know not how much per yard."

Then a little skipping was required.

"I get on famously now with the old woman, Charity Hale, whom I didn't think I should like at first. Her dry, hard manner, which I fancied was insolence, is only her way. Tell Mary Davies that Mrs. Hale has taken me to see her old friend, Eldred Sloam. Don't you remember how queer she turned that night when I teased her about him?"

"I didn't tell Davies anything of the sort," interposed Miss

Agate, parenthetically. "It is only Evelyn's nonsense," and she resumed the letter:

"This Eldred Sloam has been very ill. He hurt his leg running away from something when he was tipsy. Popular report at once whispered that it was the famous family ghost. Nothing was to be seen afterwards but a wheelbarrow standing on end. I went to see him with Mrs. Hale, and he behaved like a delirious lunatic when he saw me. The family are very good to him. Mr. Leonard has once threatened to turn him away; but they know better than not to be kind to him, for ——" again a judicious omission on Miss Agate's part. "The ghost I mentioned as 'walking' is still going about. But now there are said to be two more ghosts in addition! The latest arrivals from Spiritland are a young man, and a woman who is attired in a green gown: age uncertain. The village nerves are shaken to the last degree This last report came to Mr. Leonard's ears, and he is very angry: he thinks it all nonsense. Mrs. Raven takes these stories to heart, somehow, though one cannot imagine she can be frightened by such things."

"There," said Miss Agate, "I think we must wait a little, and see what comes next. My nerves have grown quieter in merely talking out the whole thing. And now you are in town, I shall not feel so lonely in the matter: there is somebody to appeal to. Of course, I could not discuss things relating to your family with anybody unconnected with it," she added, turning to Frank.

"Miss Agate," said Frank, earnestly, "I don't believe there is anything at Ravenscourt that need alarm you. But you know there are histories and tragedies in all families." She smiled: for he quite forgot her own story; and he went on to say, with some excitement, "Perhaps I shall have one to tell you some day. Your niece may have one, too."

"Must have one," said Miss Agate, calmly. "The facts of Evelyn's life prove that. It will be odd if that history comes to light when we have quite left off expecting it."

There came again that heavy knocking at the wall. This time the raps followed swiftly and sharply; there was no mistaking the peremptoriness of their summons. Miss Agate ran out of the room without a word.

"We must go the moment she comes back," whispered Philip. They could hear voices in the adjoining chamber: the one, thin, shrill, and excited; the other, soothing and sweet.

Miss Agate returned presently, with a slight appearance of agitation. "I must not detain you longer," she said; "my poor brother has asked something he never asked before—never once all these years. He actually wanted to know who was in here: he had heard a voice, he said, and must know whose it was. He must have heard all the voices always, but he has never noticed one before. He is trembling. Some tone must have struck his wandering fancy. I

think I must go and sit with him, and talk about Simonides and Theocritus. I always keep him off the Greek tragedians; his own history is too like them. Come back as soon as you can."

"We were forced to come away in the conventional manner, I suppose," said Philip to Frank, as they walked homewards, "for she would not have allowed us to stay. Nevertheless, Mr. Agate has once been the victim of a terrible mania, and one always wonders whether any agitating circumstance might not bring back the attack. But I am sure his sister would even die in his service; and it could not be harder than the life she has lived for his sake."

The Temple Chambers were in gloom when they re-entered them. But, even at the first moment, there was light enough for Philip to see a yellow envelope on the table. He pounced upon it. Telegrams were not so common in those days as now, and an air of disaster, or at least of destiny, hung about them.

It was for Frank, from Mrs. Raven, and it summoned him thus:

"Come to Ravenscourt at once. Your brother is suddenly taken ill; and there are also great trouble and anxiety of other kinds."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A SLIGHT CLUE.

Frank started for Ravenstoke in the early hours of the morning. He would reach the Court by breakfast time. Philip saw him off.

Of all possible returnings to the Court, this which he was now making would have been the very last to enter Frank Raven's mind. Sent for by Mrs. Raven!—sent for, too, as a mainstay and refuge in a time of trouble!

When the train drew up at Ravenstoke station, there was Mrs. Raven standing on the platform, awaiting it. This was a most unusual attention from her. Frank could not remember her having ever shown it before to anybody, not even to his father. And over the low wall of the station, Frank could see the pony-chaise in charge of James Sloam.

Mrs. Raven put her hand into Frank's without a word of greeting, and looked up into his face with faded, tearless eyes.

"Your brother is very ill indeed," she said. "He has had an attack which seems like those of his childhood. But they say it is very significant now. The doctors tell me we must face the worst."

Frank had led her to the chaise while she spoke.

"You will drive me back yourself, please," she said. "James can return on foot."

"My cousin Philip asked me to telegraph to him, directly I met you," observed Frank, as he assisted her to her seat. "I suppose I may say all else is well except poor Leonard. For your telegram

mentioned other troubles, and Philip is very anxious to offer his services if they can be of any use. Shall he come?"

Mrs. Raven hesitated. "No," she decided; "at least, not just now. You can send for him afterwards, if you like."

"Then I must say that Leonard is very ill, but everybody else is safe and in good health?" said Frank.

"Yes," she answered, and added, speaking slowly: "About what was it that you had any anxiety?"

"Nothing exactly," Frank returned: "only, through your telegram, I understood something more was wrong. And Philip read the message too, and as he is to see Miss Agate this evening, his report of it might make her anxious."

Frank almost expected a rebuke for remembering anybody but themselves at such a time. But the lady only sighed. "Ah, yes, poor Miss Agate. Telegraph at once to Mr. Connell, Frank."

During their drive up to the Court, Mrs. Raven told her son the few bald facts at her command. After her return home, everything had gone on as usual at the Court and in the village. Only, there had always been this disagreeable, unsettling gossip about the ghost, or rather the ghosts; though Worsfold's story, for he began it, seemed too trivial for serious reflection. But for Frank's letter of inquiry from Coltburn, this story might have been long in reaching Leonard's ears, for people are always the last to hear unpleasant things about their own houses and ancestors. But immediately on receipt of Frank's letter, Leonard had asked a few questions, and had received answers which roused a naturally indignant curiosity. And now, during the last few days—the time since Mrs. Raven's return—the rumour had grown bigger, and a new touch of sensation was added by the account of the woman form with the white cap, and the old-style green print gown. Mrs. Raven looked earnestly at Frank as she communicated this last item. She could not guess that Frank was already in possession of it, through Evelyn's letter to Miss Agate.

"Oh, I have heard something of that," Frank said. "Miss Evelyn Agate mentioned it in a letter to her aunt, who repeated it to us when we were visiting her last night. I can understand how much these things have annoyed Leonard: he should have heard nothing of them from me, if it had not seemed absolutely necessary."

Mrs. Raven shook her head mournfully. "Your brother was very angry," she said. "As to the tall figure which the foolish people call 'Squire Eldred,' he believed it must be the man Sloam masquerading for some nefarious purposes of his own. But when he heard that Sloam was lying injured in bed, and had been himself alarmed by something he had met in the Warren—and when Worsfold's story was added, Leonard did not know what to think."

"Certainly it became impossible to imagine it was all delusion," observed Frank.

"So Leonard said at the time: if it was some underhand work,

it was evidently extensively organised. And he determined to sift it to the bottom."

"What did he do?" asked Frank, driving slowly.

Mrs. Raven went on. "The tall, huge figure seemed to have been seen at all hours after dusk. On the few occasions that the two other figures have been seen—for people, since Worsfold, own to having seen them—it was always near midnight, long after the Court and all the respectable houses in the village were closed."

"The odd thing is, why anybody should instantly attach a thought of the supernatural to these figures," pondered Frank. "There must be something behind to account for this. For, though respectable houses may be shut for the night, young women, even from the same respectable houses, may venture to take a ramble with a clandestine lover. I believe our own servants have sometimes done so."

Mrs. Raven shook her head deprecatingly at the absent servants. "Leonard thought this very possible," she said. "The story ran, that the figures had been seen, from a distance, at the back of the Court, also in Ash Lane, also at the corner of the moor. Leonard resolved to watch these places himself; and to have Budd and Mr. Fisher, of the White Hart, not far off—to seize upon the offenders, you understand, Frank."

"A very good idea," observed Frank, with approbation. "They are elderly enough to be trustworthy, and if armed with good staves they could be effective."

"So they went out the night before last," pursued his mother. "Leonard told me nothing about it beforehand," she added, with a wailing note in her voice.

"He only wanted to spare you trouble," said Frank.

"He went," she sighed, "and the others went with him. Their instructions were to keep out of sight, but to follow him up if they heard him give a call or a cry of any sort. They were to listen for a whistle. 'I expect to meet nothing worse than a pair of belated lovers,' said Leonard to them, 'and we need not let them know we have been watching.' So he went on in advance. Budd and Fisher saw him turn into Ash Lane, and they had not quite reached its corner, when they heard a shriek ——"

She paused a moment, and then resumed:

"Budd says that he knew in a minute there was something altogether wrong, because it was not a halloa or a call—but a terrible cry. They both rushed forward. And there was your poor brother, lying on the ground quite insensible."

"That was the night before last, then," observed Frank. "Surely you did not telegraph to me so quickly as you might?"

"No," she said, faintly. "I waited, hoping that Leonard might recover consciousness."

"And he has not?"

She shook her head. "He may lie so for days now, the doctors say. One can scarcely call it unconsciousness—it is that deep sleep of exhaustion, which they say often follows such seizures."

"What do they call it?—a fit of some kind?" Frank asked. They were now in sight of the house.

"He had fits of an epileptic type when he was a child," she said: "as he grew stronger, they entirely ceased. But now it would seem that the evil had been only slumbering all the time."

"But what was it that brought it on?" Frank inquired, wondering. "Have you found out whether Leonard saw anything? Did Budd or Fisher see anything?"

"They saw nothing," she replied. "Budd says he seemed to hear something else after the cry: but he was running himself then, and cannot say what it was. Leonard, of course, has been able to tell us nothing. The doctors say that the mere excitement of the occasion, wrought to its highest pitch as he neared the hut in Ash Lane, might suffice to produce this effect on a predisposed frame. The Standchester doctor says that no reliance must be placed on any statement Leonard may make after he recovers."

As Frank assisted his mother to alight, he reflected with thankfulness that at any rate Leonard had not been troubled about the strange appearance of his father's ring at Coltburn. He knew his brother's irritability and his sensitiveness to family repute, and he was inclined to think that the ruffling of these emotions had prepared a sickly and predisposed frame to suddenly succumb to the enemy lurking latent within it.

Frank went straight to his brother's room. But there was no use in lingering there. The poor squire lay wrapped in deadly slumber. Two trained nurses were in attendance, under the orders of the Standchester doctor, Dr. Wragge. One of them, Mary Bray, was well known in the neighbourhood; the other was a stranger, who it was presumed was special to this line of work, and at whom the servants looked with awe and deference, while Mary Bray watched her with jealous gaze.

The strange nurse was a little woman with a pale face and black eyes, and her every movement betokened thorough training and discipline. She wore a brown dress, so severely plain that it was clearly a uniform, and Dr. Wragge addressed her as "Nurse Hannah."

Frank persuaded Mrs. Raven to go to her chamber and lie down. She obeyed him in an automatic kind of way. She was as one stunned. The sleep which had fallen upon Leonard's whole frame, almost seemed to have seized her mind. But there was nothing very strange in that. Nature always has her anodynes, and pain itself passes into a narcotic.

The young man went up to his own little room. How strange it looked! A change in ourselves makes a change of scene in the most

familiar places. Frank carelessly opened his valise, and threw out his slippers, and then it occurred to him that he might as well write a note to his cousin Philip. It would be in time to catch the mid-day train, and could tell more than the telegram had told. He would urge Philip to write again to Coltburn, and spur the detectives on in their work. If they should really see fit to prosecute their inquiries as to the Oriental Mystery as far as Ravenscourt, Frank began to think that many mysteries might be unearthed at once.

He only wrote a brief letter, and then he thought he would post it himself. The silence in the house oppressed him, and he was glad of an excuse to taste a breath of fresh air, and get a sight of the old familiar trees. Passing the gatekeeper's lodge, he met Mrs. Sims, the housekeeper, stepping out of its door. He stopped and spoke to her. She was solemn and portentous.

"I said to Budd, that night, sir," she said, "there'd be no good come of being too curious. Mysteries is mysteries, and it's best not meddling with things whose locks and springs you know nought about. It was natural in the master, sir; aye, and good of him, for poor folk about were getting awful scared. But then, as it is now, matters is worse."

"Not if people could look at my poor brother's accident sensibly, as the doctors tell them to," said Frank. "And have you heard of the man Sloam during the last day or two? Surely everybody is willing to believe that his fright or injury was caused by his own fault? Eldred Sloam going home at midnight, means that Eldred Sloam was going home not sober."

Mrs. Sims shook her head. "The boy James, sir, says his father was very bad. His head seemed affected. I believe it was something he'd said to Worsfold that frightened Worsfold, before the man took to the new fancies about two of them together. Charity Hale's got somebody from somewhere to look after Eldred now. James says she seems to be a distant relation of his mother's, but he thinks she doesn't want to own the connection."

"Indeed," said Frank, not much interested.

"But I'm thinking of the master," said Mrs. Sims, dolefully. "They carried him into Eldred's house when he was took, and this person did her best for him, and did it right well, Dr. Wragge says. It was strange it should be to Eldred's house the master should be taken," she added, shaking her head. For though Mrs. Sims professed to be above the weaknesses of her fellows, she had not forgotten the fortune-teller's hints about the root of the Raven tree lying under Eldred Sloam's hearthstone.

"Do you know whether Mrs. Raven has sent to thank her?" asked Frank.

"I expect, sir, she hasn't given it a thought yet, poor lady."

"At any rate, I will walk down there at once, and thank her in the name of the family."

He went to Sloam's house through the village, passing some familiar faces as he went. A strong wind in the night had swept down many leaves, and autumn was clearly changing into winter. On Sloam's low cottage wall, the Virginian creeper had shed its last ruddy beauty, and the doors and windows of the house were all shut.

Frank fancied that he saw somebody move within as he passed the long, low-eaved casement, and so he expected his light tap to be promptly answered. But in this he was disappointed. He knocked again, and again, louder each time, yet fruitlessly, and at last stepped back and peeped through the window. He could see half of the interior, but not the two farther corners, in one of which Eldred's bed stood. Going back to the door, he gently raised the latch.

Eldred was on his bed, apparently deep in heavy slumber. No other living creature was to be seen. The room was quite clean and neat, presenting a very changed appearance since the evening when Charity and Evelyn had visited it and met the Vicar there. Probably the woman in charge had taken advantage of Eldred's deep slumber to go down into the village, and do a little marketing. Frank felt that he was mistaken in thinking somebody moved, when he first passed the windows. He must have been deceived by a flicker of light and shade on sundry garments hanging on nails outside a closet door.

He had all an English gentleman's feelings about intrusion—especially upon humble folk. And he certainly would not have dreamed of penetrating farther into the cottage. Except one is playing at hide-and-seek, one does not look for people in dark cupboards. If Frank had done so, he might have found reason to ask why a sane woman need hide herself in one, because a gentleman of the Court had come to call on her.

Frank thought he would go home the other way, and survey the haunted paths. They looked peaceful enough in the clear cold light. There was a little clump of tall trees at the corner where Ash Lane broke off from the Common, and then there was nothing but hedgerows and a few thin saplings all down the lane to the old carthouse. There were no gnarled stumps to cast weird shadows on a moonlight night, or to loom into undue prominence on a misty one. Even the hedgerow was rather lower than is common, and thin and straggling into the bargain, for the land thereabouts was rather poor.

Presently Frank stood in front of the ruined carthouse and looked round.

He thought he could make out where his brother had fallen. It was on his right hand as he stood there—at that side of the carthouse nearest to Ravenscourt. The earth was heavily trampled, and some tall weeds lay broken and dead.

He turned and looked in the other direction. How very poor the hedge was! Why, it almost seemed as if there had once been an

opening in it. Frank moved towards it with vivid curiosity. There had certainly been an opening, and the boughs were still hanging as if they had been rudely and recently brushed aside. The whole yielded easily to a sudden pressure, as Frank himself passed through, and then it closed again behind him much as before.

He stood on the other side, and looked back towards the lane. If his brother had really seen anything, then this was the way by which it had disappeared from the sight of Budd and Fisher. And Frank's heart gave a leap. There was something sticking in the hedge—a small, white something. It might be a clue, however faint.

Why did his breath come hard and his cheek turn pale, as he disentangled it and held it in his hand? It was but a torn scrap of coarse muslin, starred with a quaint flower pattern—an article which might be bought at any country shop, anywhere.

But Frank had seen a piece of similar stuff before. And that was in Alice Cleare's work-basket.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AN AGENT ABOUT THE COURT.

FRANK went home like one in a dream: and yet with a clear purpose. He must write to Alice Cleare at once, and ask her where she had got that muslin, and whether she knew of anybody else who had some like it. And when he sat down, and promptly wrote the letter, that was all he said, except that he sent messages of kind remembrance to all the Connell family. Frank sent this letter by the same post which took his other epistle to Philip.

The hours passed drearily. Frank sat with his mother and Evelyn Agate at meals, but Mrs. Raven was in a state of nervous exhaustion, which caused her to shrink almost at a word or a look, and made her son feel that the most dutiful kindness he could show was to leave her in quietness. The younger lady seemed gloomy and absorbed, never originated a remark, and only answered shortly when addressed.

The doctors came and went. There was no perceptible change in the patient, either for better or worse; and the only cause for satisfaction was that everything which wealth, skill and money could do, was certainly being done. Dr. Wragge was quite enthusiastic in his delight at having secured the services of so valuable a person as "Nurse Hannah."

"And it happened providentially, as one may say," he told Frank. "I was sent for to your poor brother at about two o'clock in the morning, and as soon as I got to the Court I sent back for my regular nurse, Bray, a good woman, thorough-trained, and not to be surpassed in a general way; but if her experience is less on one point than on another, it is on the very matter we have in hand just now."

"You don't have many cases of this sort among our healthy peasantry, I dare say," said Frank.

"No, no. Still I can't say I felt anxious, for good common sense, goodwill, and good discipline go far of themselves in nursing. But just as I'm sitting down to my breakfast, in walks Nurse Hannah to see me. I hadn't seen her of late years, but I'd heard of her from time to time, among my professional brethren, as having given up her hospital work and taken to private nursing, especially in mental cases. And now here she came in, saying she was taking a little change of air from her labours in London, and that, finding herself in my neighbourhood, she had remembered our old acquaintance, and had thought that if I had any nice comfortable duty to give her, she was quite fit to undertake it. An angel from heaven couldn't have been more welcome, my dear Mr. Frank. Yes, Nurse Hannah," he added, as she entered the room, to ask for further instruction in some matter of drugs or diet, "I'm talking about you, and your arrival in the very nick of time."

The little woman looked up at Frank Raven. She had the watching eyes of her calling. There was just a momentary quiver of the muscles about her mouth—a little smile with a spice of mockery in it. The Reverend Jasper Toynbee, who had then come in to inquire after the Squire, noticed it, and remarked as she went away:

"Uniforms may disguise human nature, but they don't change it. Half of a nun's saintliness is often in her coif. I fancy we set our faces to match our clothes, doctor. If that little woman hadn't been a trained nurse, she would have laughed outright just now, and I fear it would have been at you. Your comparing her with an angel tickled her tremendously!"

"Well, well," said the doctor, good-naturedly, "everybody is all the better for a laugh. It is the cheapest and safest medicine going, and even if people take it at our expense, it leaves us none the poorer."

"I'm afraid your poor brother never allowed himself enough laughter," said the reverend gentleman to Frank, as the doctor went out. "This is all very sad, my boy."

"Yes, indeed," answered Frank, "but I think Dr. Wragge seems rather hopeful to-day."

The clergyman shook his head dubiously. Dr. Wragge was an old friend of his, and he had spoken plainly to him. There might be an apparently satisfactory rallying, but the real end would inevitably be speedy death; or else the long, lingering death-in-life of imbecility. The old gentleman looked a little wistfully at the gallant young man before him, who might so soon be the last of this fated Raven race.

"Had you noticed any change whatever in Leonard before this attack?" Frank asked.

"There was no difference at all in Leonard," said Mr. Toynbee. "None that I could see. In fact, I thought him rather better than usual; perhaps that was a bad sign! Of course, I've seen him almost

every day, but the last conversation I had with him was when I dined here while you were all away. He was quite facetious—for him. He almost offended me."

And Mr. Toynbee suddenly looked grave. But it was not at the remembrance of Leonard's puerile jests at an old bachelor's inquisitive questions concerning the new young lady companion, Evelyn Agate. It was at the recollection of that problem in which those questions had really originated, which had haunted him since he first saw Evelyn, and of that most unexpected solution which he believed he had received on the night when he met her and Charity Hale in Eldred Sloam's cottage. Mr. Toynbee would never lightly ask another question concerning Evelyn Agate's antecedents.

"It has been most unfortunate that your brother's attack should come on at such a time, Frank, and under such circumstances. You cannot imagine in what a state the neighbourhood has been thrown. It was at fever-heat after Sloam's accident, and the Squire's misfortune has broken down all reserve on the subject."

Frank looked up at the Vicar. It was hard not to tell him his whole story. "What is your explanation of the matter, sir?" asked the young man, after a pause.

"You are not asking me whether or not I believe in the ghosts, are you?" said Mr. Toynbee, with a little dry laugh.

"But, don't you think my brother must have seen something?"

The Vicar glanced at him. "There is the doctor's explanation of excitement, bringing on the latent disease. Your brother had similar fits in infancy; we must rest content with that if we can get at nothing better."

"I could rest content with it, so far as regards himself. I cannot with the theory that it is only imagination which has been at work in all the other cases," answered Frank. "May it not suit some ill-designing person or persons to dress up and play the farce for a purpose?"

"I thought of that, too," answered the Vicar. "But then, who could it be? The only person at all likely to indulge in nefarious tricks, or to tempt others to such a trick, is Eldred Sloam himself: and it could not have been he whom your brother saw, for he had been leg-fast to his bed since days before. Unless, indeed, he was shamming very skilfully."

"You see there is little unnatural or portentous in the alleged appearances themselves," laughed Frank: "no horns or hoofs, or phosphoric lights." And he told the story of Alice Cleare's walk from Gerstowe, and his accidental meeting with her on that occasion after leaving the Vicar's own dinner table, and of the figure which had scared her.

Mr. Toynbee listened attentively. Frank continued. "What I want to know is, at what point did the notion creep in that this mysterious figure is anything else than an ordinary prowler. I want

to know at what point this figure got the reputation of being the persistent wraith of my great-uncle, vowing vengeance on the Court."

"I don't know of any stranger in the village," pondered Mr. Toynbee. "The few lodgers are all decent people with settled situations. We have had our usual summer and autumn visitation from artists—the same old faces, and the very same white umbrellas and camp stools. We have not had a gipsy for months. Nor any excursions from Standchester. Your brother discouraged them coming to the Court grounds because of your father's recent death."

He paused as he said that. He might have added that Leonard had also observed they trampled down the grass, and made the villagers discontented. If Leonard had been well, and likely for long life, the Vicar might have roguishly narrated this characteristic trait.

"The only stranger I can recollect who made any impression on me," the Vicar went on presently, "was a young man whom I saw one day this autumn—yes, I remember it was the very day your mother returned from Coltburn. I can recollect that, because I was on my way to Sloam's cottage, and it was the coming in of Miss Evelyn Agate and Hale while I was there that first let me know Mrs. Raven had come back so unexpectedly."

"And this young man——" said Frank anxiously, keeping the clergyman to his main discourse.

"This young man was sitting on the suicide's grave in our churchyard," pursued Mr. Toynbee. "I think it was that which made me notice him at all. No Ravenstoke man would do that, you know. And I own it gave me a shiver to see him there. He was very dark, thin and pale, and he started up when he heard my footstep on the grass. I wondered at the time whether some law of affinity might not have drawn him to that grave. Ah, you see I have my own superstitions, young man."

"And you never saw him again?" asked Frank, rather dreamily. For he could not see any reason for imagining a connection between a wandering pedestrian and a perpetual ghost. And, meantime, he heard footsteps going softly to and fro in the room overhead. It was his bed-room. And it occurred to him that he had left his writing-case open.

"No, I never saw him again," said the Vicar. "Of course there must have been plenty of other strangers here in a casual way. It was only his sitting on that grave which made me remember him, for I'm afraid my memory for faces and even for facts, is beginning to fade. But I am forgetting the very thing I particularly wanted to say —something your brother told me that day when I dined with him."

The Vicar lowered his voice, as people do when they are about to make an important communication. Frank leaned forward, interested.

"I did not think much of it at the time," said the Vicar. "I thought there was probably some mistake in the matter."

"What was it?" asked Frank, eagerly.

"But now it becomes equally important whether it was a fancy or a fact," pursued the Vicar, deliberately, "because, in the one case, it may prove an insidious on-coming of mental confusion and trepidation in his mind, suddenly bursting out at last.—And, to speak the truth, Frank, I have a conviction that the business falling upon Leonard in consequence of his inheritance has been too much for him. See how he has worried his brain for hours, evening after evening, over the intricate accounts.—In the other case, it goes towards the theory of the secret presence in this house of untrustworthy, designing people. Well, Leonard spoke to me about your father's ring—the red intaglio."

"And what about it?" asked Frank, breathlessly. If the Vicar had been watching him, he might have noticed that the young man put his fingers into his waistcoat pocket and touched something there. It was the ring. He had not worn it on his finger since his return to Ravenscourt, but had fastened it to his watch chain, out of sight.

"Leonard thought he had lost it," said the Vicar. "He felt quite sure he had put it away in a certain drawer in his bureau, and when he chanced to look there, it was gone; so he declared he was terribly vexed about it. I expect it is really there, all right," Mr. Toynbee added. "And that mistake need not argue much mental muddle either. More than once, I have lost things, and found them, months after, in their proper place."

Amid all his perturbation, Frank could scarcely help smiling at the good man's simple self-satisfaction—while all the while his own absent-mindedness, and the faithful but domineering "management" of his old housekeeper, were bye-words in the village.

"I know where the ring is," said Frank, slowly, and rather guardedly. "My brother was right: it was removed from its proper place, and it was recovered in a very unaccountable way. I have it now, quite safely."

The Vicar looked at Frank with a shade of friendly suspicion. Did Frank think he had a right to that ring as a personal remembrance of his father, and so had possessed himself of it? But the Vicar would have as soon expected the church tower to fall, as to find his old patron's younger son guilty of the least wilful evasion or misleading. No; that could not be!

Their eyes met. The candid young face flushed with the mere consciousness of a secret.

"There is some sort of conspiracy going on about the Court," said Frank. "The removal of that ring was one sign of it. And there have been others. In simple fact, sir, sundry matters have come to my knowledge which have compelled me to apply for help to a detective. I would tell you all about it, only until something is discovered, a slur of suspicion, probably quite groundless, seems to rest on every name that has to be drawn into the matter."

Mr. Toynbee sat silent and thoughtful. He knew that he, too, had his little secret—the solution of his problem about Evelyn's face

—which he kept to himself for equally unselfish reasons. "It is a terrible world," thought the Vicar to himself; "and one of its laws seems to be that the innocent must suffer for the guilty, but while we can help it we ourselves need not be their executioners."

"May I ask one thing," said he, with that fine courtliness which would not for one moment take advantage of his position to intrude into Frank's confidence. "May I ask if it is any dishonesty that you fear?"

Frank hesitated a moment. He was quite at ease now that he had admitted the existence of a secret.

"No," he said: "at least, not exactly. Only as dishonesty is part of every wrong thing. It is something that concerns family matters —that may concern me more than anybody else."

The old clergyman looked at him wistfully. "It seems only the other day that I christened you. I hope you are well-advised in all you are doing, Frank. You young folks frighten us elders sometimes. You are so rash."

"My Uncle Connell knows all about the matter," said Frank, simply. "I was in his house when it first began. I told him everything—almost more than I should tell, I think. But he is kind and sensible."

"A good man," commented the Vicar, cordially. "I have read some of his writings and heard of many of his actions."

"Mr. Connell reminded me that when I was at home here I should have a friend at hand in you," said Frank. "If anything occurs in which I need advice, I shall come to you at once, sir."

"Ask any advice you will—and tell me no more than is necessary to enable me to give advice worth having," answered the Vicar. "And I will keep my own eyes and ears open, too."

As soon as Mr. Toynbee was gone, Frank ran upstairs to his room. He had forgotten the footsteps he had heard; and there was nothing in the room to remind him that anybody had been there during his absence. But the breeze had risen, and, finding entrance at the open window, had played some havoc among the loose sheets on his writing-case. With the draught caused by the opening door as he went in, another paper whirled up and fell to the floor.

Frank hastily gathered them together. They were only blank sheets. He opened the inside of the case to thrust them into one of its pockets.

The pocket was empty. He knew it had not held much: only two or three sheets of foreign paper. With a petulant exclamation of impatience, he recognised that he had opened the wrong pocket, and turned to the other.

But, then—he paused—neither pocket ought to be empty. For in that where he had not stored stationery, he had put away the mysterious paper which he had found with the gold in the flower pot at Coltburn.

He turned again to the first pocket. It was certainly empty. Yet he was quite sure he had put the paper in his writing-case, that he had seen it there that morning; and so without a pause he turned out the contents of the second pocket.

There was the missing paper, safe enough, neatly folded between the sheets of thin foreign note.

"This is an illustration of the Vicar's remarks," mused Frank. "If I could have sworn to anything, it would be that I put that paper in the empty side. I wonder how many mistakes we make which we never find out at all? And now, I suppose, with that paper in it, I ought not to leave the case unfastened. Yet I suspect my father's ring escaped somehow from under lock and key."

However, he secured the case, and was on his way to Leonard's sick room, when he met a servant bringing him a letter. It had come in by the late post, and was from Philip. The first envelope contained no letter—only an enclosure of another envelope superscribed in a different hand, and marked—"Or please forward." Philip had scribbled on the other side:

"This came by first post: seems to have been delayed. I obey its request, especially as I fancy it is from our silent friend at Coltburn."

Frank eagerly opened the enclosed packet. Philip was right in his conjecture: it was from the detective. But the detective's communication was almost as curt as Philip's own.

"Respected Sir,—Mr. Jones has placed your latest communication with me." (That was the anonymous letter to Alice Cleare.) "He tells me how anxious you are. But a good hunt may be spoiled by jumping out before the time. I have an agent about the Court. I am doing my best.

"Yours obediently,

"Henry Cran."

"An agent about the Court!" That was, Frank knew, within his own instructions; or, at any rate, within his own permission. Had he not just said so, himself, to the Vicar? And yet now, as he stood among the old familiar surroundings, he shrank from the idea. But his strong common sense came to the rescue. It had to be.

A little natural curiosity arose as to who this agent was, and in what function he appeared. Or might it be a woman? But there were certainly only two strange women on the Court horizon just now—one in the house—to wit, the nurse, Hannah—and one probably hearing all that went on in it, from the footboy going daily two and fro to his sick father—the taciturn stranger, who had come to take care of Eldred Sloam.

The nurse was an old acquaintance of good Dr. Wragge. She was not likely to be a detective. It must be this strange woman whom Frank had so innocently and unsuccessfully tried to see. He passed the rest of the evening with his mother, sitting quietly by the unconscious Leonard.

Evelyn Agate went softly to and fro. With her own hands she brought up tea for them. And when, near midnight, they came down to the dining-room to snatch a little supper, they found the men-servants banished from the scene, and Evelyn herself in actual attendance on the wants of Mrs. Raven. Frank could not but assist her: Mrs. Raven was their mutual care; and when she bade them a sad good-night, she kissed them both, first one and then the other, and grasped a hand of each in each of hers.

Evelyn had certainly given a very perfect representation of sympathy. Frank wondered why he did not like her. Perhaps he might have understood it if he had known that directly she was behind the scenes —*i.e.*, within her own bed-room—she had executed a little private waltz, and then sat down before the glass, and smiled at her own reflection for half an hour.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

NURSE HANNAH'S TRUNK.

ALICE CLEARE'S answer to Frank came at once from Coltburn. She could not help indulging in a little feminine curiosity as to why such a question was asked. The information she could give was meagre enough. She had torn the lining of her dress during her walk to Gerstowe, on the day of her brother's death, and had gone into a little shop there and bought this material, and asked permission to sit down and repair the damage. The remnant of her purchase she still had, in the work-basket where Frank had seen it.

It is singular how slow the facts of life are, compared with human fancies and expectations. In looking forward, Frank seemed to foresee that his brother would recover consciousness and tell what he had seen, that the family would take counsel together, and that a definite line of conduct would be pointed out to them by the revelations which events would make, and by which Frank himself was determined to take his stand. Unless there was a full explanation of much that puzzled him, an entire assurance on the part of those who knew best that he was really the son of the late Squire and his wife, Frank was determined never to allow himself to stand in the position of Leonard's heir. For if he were not the child of the house, where and who was the child? The name of Evelyn Agate answered his silent query. The coincidence of their birthdays, her mysterious origin, turned to this direction.

Yet, if Evelyn were really a child taken from Ravenscourt, then who was he? An Agate? Yet had he the Raven face.

It must be owned that when Frank contemplated a possibility which might take his name and his rank from him, it was always easier to do so if he fancied that at the same time he should find himself Gertrude Agate's nephew, with home-rights in that quaint

domicile ; which, despite its old tragedy and its living skeleton, seemed to him the brightest home in the world. But what had not entered into Frank's mind to conceive, was the length of time for which he would be left to indulge in all these speculations, without coming any nearer to their settlement.

Leonard's partial recovery was of the very slowest. Consciousness came back after some days: he slept, took nourishment, spoke a few words, making clear that he knew where he was and by whom surrounded, and then he relapsed into slumber.

There seemed no doubt that the brain had somewhat given way. Very gently, but very persistently, did the medical men warn mother and brother not to build hopes that the head of the family would ever be restored to them in any complete and joyful sense.

"The mystery of that last hour is so dreadful," said Mrs Raven, one day, sitting before the doctor with clasped hands.

"You must not think of it in that light," answered Dr. Wragge, kindly. "I do not believe there was any horror at all, except your son's own fit ; and, remember, if the very slight excitement he had undergone sufficed to bring it on, then something else would surely have done so on some other and speedy occasion."

"Do you think that a tendency to delusions runs in families?" she asked, with strange abruptness.

The doctor stole a side-long glance at Frank, as he answered :

"There is always that probability. But there are so many elements at work in all these cases, that it is impossible to foresee their particular issue. Nobody in the world can be more unlike than some members of the same families. That is because they chance to derive their constitution and temperament—their very nature, as it were, from different sides of the house. For instance, madam, your own two sons are singularly unlike."

Frank's heart gave a great thump. He looked at his mother.

"Frank is not much like me, indeed," she said. "And Leonard is my very image. Then, Doctor Wragge," she added, "you infer that Leonard must have derived his infliction from me?"

"A delicate constitution manifests itself in divers ways in individuals," answered the doctor, diplomatically. "Have you ever heard of any distant relative who was afflicted in this manner?"

"No," she said, with a slight hesitancy. "Would it be possible to be subject to a visual delusion without knowing it?—to see something again and again, and go on believing it to be a reality?"

"In that case, you see, one would get disabused by the conduct of other people," answered the doctor.

At that moment the nurse came in, and summoned Frank away by a message from the sick-room.

"I saw something three times," said the lady, speaking to the doctor slowly, as if weighing the significance of every word she uttered. "I saw something three times, which I believed each time to be real. I

believed I knew what it was, and what it was doing. Other people saw that something too, but they could not understand any significance in it, and were only mystified. I heard so many explanations offered of what they had seen, that I scarcely knew what to think."

"Did you tell your part of the story?" asked the doctor, interested.

"No," she said, with the ghost of a smile. "I kept that to myself."

"That reticence inclines me to think you were not mistaken."

"But don't you think that some great anxiety or terror might make such reticence possible even to a diseased mind?" asked Mrs. Raven.

The doctor was nonplussed. He had thought he should certainly please the lady by pronouncing in favour of her intellectual soundness. But now he felt that somehow she would have been better pleased if he had doubted it. What was one to do with such a woman?

"Well," said Mrs. Raven, with that strange smile still lingering on her face. "I feel quite certain that Leonard has inherited this terrible disease through me. You won't forget what I have told you, doctor?"

"Oh no," answered Dr. Wragge: and he thought that if Mrs. Raven had wanted to commit a crime and to set up a plea of not guilty on the ground of insanity, she could not have laid her plan better.

And then the weary days wore on. The time came when Leonard, of his own accord, recalled and spoke of the events immediately preceding his accident.

His story was, that he had certainly seen a man and a woman coming along Ash Lane to meet him. He entirely refused to admit that he had been particularly excited or alarmed. He had had time to notice the white cap and the green gown which village rumour had always attributed to the female's appearance. Then he had felt a sudden strange sensation, and had heard a cry, which he could scarcely believe had been his own utterance. He remembered no more.

This entirely agreed with the doctor's conviction as to the history of his malady. But at first, Leonard refused to believe the doctor's explanation, that the two people in the lane were nothing but the phantasmagoria of his own brain creating, in the on-coming of disease, those images towards which his expectation had been directed. Not that Leonard thought they were ghosts—oh no, the man was sure to be some disreputable stranger; the woman, not unlikely, one of their own servants, giving ear to his blandishments.

On this suggestion, Frank interviewed Mrs. Sims, who again indignantly repelled it. Every female servant about the Court had been indoors on that evening.

"Miss Agate can tell you they were all sitting together at needle-

work," insisted Mrs. Sims. "I'm not making any mistake about the date. For she was locked in her room, quite early in the evening, and Fanny went knocking at her door, asking questions, knowing what a pretty taste she has in cutting out. Miss Agate made answer she was lying down with a bad headache, but would come down directly she could. And so she did, and showed the girls what to do; and I am positively sure not one of the girls went out after that."

But, presently, Leonard began to yield to the doctor's representations concerning the on-coming of his illness, and then a new danger presented itself. He began to dread the return of the phantasm—as a phantasm. For would it not mean another stretch of helpless misery, another step taken downward on the path of disease and death? The doctors scarcely knew what to do. They could not deny his reasoning, yet his fear was the surest means of compassing what he feared.

One painful form this fear took was a constant secret doubt of his own perceptions. Did a stranger unexpectedly appear on the lawn, he would ask nervously:

"Don't I see a man in black, or a woman in a shawl?" as the case might be.

And Frank would answer, quietly, "Yes," and add some little detail of the stranger's personal appearance to re-assure Leonard in his own eyes. But he and Mrs. Raven knew what all this meant.

Autumn was fairly gone, and winter had come, and the slow weeks had brought none of those vivid changes towards which imagination looks. Leonard came down from his bed-room, and lay on couches in the public apartments, and grew vexed and irritable over matters he could no longer control, and tried his watchers' patience and tact, as invalids in this stage always do. They would scarcely have known how to bear their burden, but for the ready wit and skill of Nurse Hannah, still retained, though the local nurse, Mrs. Bray, had departed for other cases. Frank felt that he had been quite right in his quick decision that this little quiet woman, who seemed so passionately absorbed in her profession, was not the agent of the detective, wherever that agent might be.

There seemed little ground for the popular belief that the woman who had kept Eldred Sloam's cottage, and who was still said to occasionally visit him, was a relation of his dead wife. The boy James could only say that his father had evidently known her before, and, as the lad put it, "respected" her, a filial phrase which Frank translated into "feared" her. Jem himself clearly shared the feeling. And though, during her stay, all the lad's decent instincts of order, cleanliness and good hours had been fully gratified, yet he seemed glad when she was gone.

Eldred himself was moving about again, though not yet fit for work. His clothes had been neatly mended and a considerable

addition made to their stock, and he did not frequent the Pitchfork as of old and was more guarded in his conduct altogether. People called him " a changed man "—a kindly judgment from which shrewd Mrs. Sims begged to differ.

And so Christmas-tide drew nigh. All the brightness that was in the house came from without, in cheery letters from the Coltburn Connells—though they were not without their troubles, too, for Louisa continued very unwell, and was advised to seek change of air.

Gertrude Agate wrote constantly to Evelyn, and somehow, little by little, her letters grew to be regarded as public property. When they came in, Mrs. Raven always asked the news, and Evelyn was nothing loth to tell what there was, and to add tit-bits of her adopted aunt's wisdom and humour. For these always interested Frank, and drew her and the young man towards each other as nothing else did. Philip's letters, again, full of wit and sparkle, told Frank what Gertrude's never alluded to, that the anonymous letters had entirely ceased, and that peace had returned to Miss Agate's little household, albeit her unhappy brother was at times strangely restless. Frank privately wondered that he received no further sign from the detectives, but nothing came.

It was Christmas Eve. There were, indeed, few signs of festivity about the Court—in short, none, except some holly and mistletoe stuck upon the picture frames, and a slight increase in the arrival of letters, due to the appearance of Christmas cards. Evelyn had gone about the house all day in an abstracted and nervous manner. She said that she felt one of her headaches coming on, but she would keep going about as long as she could. Mrs. Raven urged her to go to her room and lie down, but she put off the lady's solicitude, lightly, though gratefully, and kept her place in the family circle.

They prepared to spend the evening, as usual, in the drawing-room. It was a still night, without the least wind, though cold enough for a light fall of snow. Such was Frank's report of the weather, as he drew aside the curtains and looked out, before taking his seat by his mother near the fire.

Leonard's couch, with his invalid writing table beside it, was drawn up close to the hearth, and Evelyn occupied her usual low chair at his right hand, where she could easily supply his many small, fidgety wants. This couch and chair faced the window, while Mrs. Raven and Frank had their backs toward it.

Sometimes, at these evening hours, one of the little group read aloud. It was not very easy to find books suitable for the circumstances. Leonard had no love for those sunny paths of literature where minds which need rest and refreshment may wander with delight and benefit. So they fell back chiefly on travels.

A book of travels lay ready this Christmas Eve; but, in the meantime, they were all engaged in looking through the illustrated literature of the season. Leonard had wanted to do this, and his slightest

wish was everybody's law now, especially as he had shown much nervous irritation during the last week, consequent on the doctor's refusing to permit him to go through the estate accounts for the close of the year, and to see his tenants as usual.

Mrs. Raven and Frank were bending over the same sheet, trying to read some picture riddles. Evelyn was idly gazing at a large brilliant chromo, and Leonard lay back exhausted with the exertion of turning over big pages, and giving forth adverse criticisms. Suddenly, he sprang up with a cry—an awful cry!

The others were on their feet in a twinkling, and rushed to him. He tried to put them away—struggling fiercely for utterance, which, after that one shriek, seemed denied him. His right arm was extended to its full length, the forefinger pointing at the window, as if he saw something; while, with his left, he grasped his mother's shoulder with a grip which she felt for hours afterwards. She knew at once that the terrible fit was on him again in its very worst form. Then a cloud gathered swiftly in his eyes, and had not all their arms been about him, he would have fallen heavily to the ground: and they knew that the curative work of months was undone.

Nurse Hannah and the servants came on the scene.

"He seemed to see something again," moaned Mrs. Raven. "He pointed—so! See: the curtains are not closely drawn."

They bore him away to his chamber. Evelyn went with Mrs. Raven to its door. "I cannot go in," said the girl, with a strong shiver; "this shock has defeated my struggle to keep up." Certainly her face was deathly pale, and the hand she laid on Mrs. Raven's trembled terribly.

"Poor dear," said the lady, wearily, "you must not be ill, too." She was wondering within herself why she too did not break down. Some people seem so hard to kill! She did not even remember then that the suffering which is slowest in manifestation is often surest in result.

"Let the young lady go away and take care of herself," said the nurse, in a quiet, kind tone. "She cannot help us here. Indeed, there will be little for any of us to do to-night."

So Evelyn went away. And the nurse busied herself in composing the unconscious sufferer in his couch, Sims and Janet Mackay assisting her. When all was as calm and bright as possible, she called the mother and brother into the room.

"He is not likely to waken for hours," she whispered; "but if he does it will be only for a moment, and it might be better that he should see you than me. I will go and see after one or two little matters that ought to be in readiness, and I may take a turn on the terrace to make me fresh and wakeful for the night. A call will summon me in a moment."

She glided away. But she went first in the direction of Evelyn's room, and laid her hand very softly on the door handle. The door

was fastened. She rapped—once—twice—thrice—each knock louder than the last. Then she knocked once more, sharply, listened a moment, and turned away with a peculiar smile on her calm countenance.

Downstairs, in the hall, she took down a dark grey cloak that hung there, and wrapping it closely about her, gently opened the outer doors and stepped upon the terrace. She walked a few paces from the house, turned round and looked up at it. She knew which was the window of Evelyn's room. Its blind was drawn, but a light burning within was clearly visible.

She returned to the terrace walk. She did not pace to and fro, but stood quite still in the darkness, at that corner which commanded the front of the building, and its side nearest to the grass path running towards Ash Lane and Sloam's cottage. What was she awaiting?

Presently she heard light steps, and could see something moving—something which looked whitish in such dim light as a few misty stars afforded. As it came towards her, Nurse Hannah stole closer and closer to the side of the house.

The light, scudding steps that she heard ceased for a moment—the whitish something, which was a garment, was taken off and folded into a small compass; and then there came gliding along the terrace towards her, carrying the folded packet in its hand, a slight, graceful, dark-robed figure. Nurse Hannah stepped forward.

There was an exclamation of surprise, a start backwards. "What, nurse! Are you too taking an airing like me!"

"There is nothing like it for those who know when it's needed, Miss Agate," returned Nurse Hannah, walking beside the young lady towards the hall door. "But I think I've had enough of it now. And I'm afraid it hasn't done you much good," she added, as she saw the intense pallor of Evelyn's face and the feverish redness of her lips.

"I almost think I should be the better for another turn or two," said the girl, running back. But she only went a few yards and turned again.

"Oh, I'm sure you wouldn't," said the nurse. "And you've been out with too few wraps—no wonder you're chilled." She was in her black silk evening dress, whose train was tucked up about her, not carried in her hands, though they were both now free. "Go right up to your room and get to bed. Just look in at Mr. Leonard's chamber on your way, will you, please, and tell Mrs. Raven that I've come back into the house, and will be with her the moment I've had a bit of supper. Poor lady, I dare say she's nervous."

Nurse Hannah lingered, unfastening her cloak, till Evelyn had disappeared upstairs: then, with a speed strangely contrasted with her usual quiet and deliberate movements, she again went outside, ran rapidly to the spot to which Evelyn had run, and there moved oddly

from side to side of the path in the gloom, as if she was feeling for something with her feet.

Whatever she expected to find, she apparently found it. She caught it up, and wrapped it in her cloak which she was now carrying, not on her shoulders, but over her arm. She hastily made the cloak into a careless-looking bundle, returned to the house, went straight to the housekeeper's room, dropped her bundle into the depths of a great old-fashioned easy chair which stood there, sat down on guard in front of it, and requested that some refreshment might be brought to her as speedily as possible.

She had scarcely begun to eat the meal, hastily set before her, when Evelyn looked into the room to ask Mrs. Sims some casual question. The young lady took no notice of Nurse Hannah, till that worthy woman again warned her that she looked poorly, and that she would be better in her warm bed : when she answered coldly that she would go there in a few minutes' time.

Nurse Hannah snatched a very hasty meal. In fact, she scarcely touched the food prepared. "Does Miss Evelyn have a hot bottle in her bed generally?" she inquired, absently.

"No," said Mrs. Sims. "I don't encourage young ladies in such ways unless they ask me. A deal of the habits folks get into depends on what servants train 'em in."

"Let me take one up to-night, then," said Nurse Hannah. "She will be the better for it now. She looks thoroughly chilled."

She carried it upstairs in one hand, and her rolled-up cloak in the other. She took the cloak to her own room, and bundled it and its invisible contents into her own big box; then she carefully locked that box, and brought away its key in her pocket. She went on to Evelyn's room ; again she knocked ; again there was no answer, and she tried the door. It was unfastened now, and she went in. The room was empty.

She put the bottle in the bed and lingered over it, smoothing the sheets and patting the pillows. So, therefore, she seemed quite naturally employed, and in no sense watching or waiting, when presently Evelyn arrived, a little breathless.

Nurse Hannah told her, cheerfully, what she had done for her comfort, hoped she would be better in the morning, and bade her good-night.

But before Nurse Hannah went to take up her watch by Leonard Raven's bed, she paid another visit to her own chamber, and took a very leisurely survey of the recent addition to the contents of her trunk. It was only a light green dressing-gown.

(To be continued.)

MY SATURDAYS.

ARCHIE'S LADYE-LOVE.

IV.

LADY JACOBS did not attend Tamston Church, but always went to a little country church nearer her own house. This fact being known to me and communicated to Archie, I had not the pleasure of his company next morning, as he betook himself across the fields to the little square-towered, ivy-smothered building where Imogen might be expected to worship.

He came back somewhat disappointed. She had been there, but so had Lady Anderton, and he had not been able to speak to her. They had stayed in their pew so long that he had to leave first, and wait about awkwardly in the churchyard; and when at last they passed him, a grave bow from her and a cold one from Lady Anderton were all that he obtained. After the *rapprochement* of yesterday afternoon, and the open love-making of the evening, he felt pushed off again to a distance, and all the ground seemed lost.

I tried to show him that under such difficult circumstances matters could not go smoothly until they had had a thorough explanation, both with each other and with her authorities, and that it was impossible that she should defy her step-mother until she was absolutely engaged to him. He assented dubiously, and so I was drawn on to betray Lady Jacobs's confidence (to which, after all, I know she would not in the least have objected), and tell him how far Imogen had already gone in resisting Lady Anderton for his sake. This cheered him up; but I could see that as soon as she was out of sight, his mind set to work to exaggerate the force of the influences around her, and he lost faith in her power or determination to fight against them.

Altogether, it was a rather uncomfortable Sunday, and my temper was not improved by the advent of Mrs. Minton and Lucilla, just as Archie and I were having a five o'clock cup of coffee. Sunday visiting is not a Tamston fashion—at least among the ladies; but they had made up a rubbishy pretext—I *know* it was a pretext—of asking him to inquire at the terminus next morning about some parcel which had not been sent down. Suppressed exultation lurked in Lucilla's frequent laugh, and whispered out of every flower on her mother's bonnet.

"I hope you brought Miss Moville back safely last night, Mr. Rintoul?" giggled Lucilla.

"Quite safely, thank you," Archie answered, nonchalantly. "There was no particular danger."

"Oh, I think there always is danger on the river," said Mrs. Minton. "One never knows what may happen; and under the circumstances, of course, it would have been so *very* sad if anything had happened."

"Under any circumstances it would be very dull if nothing ever happened," he replied, contemplating sadly his empty coffee-cup, with a conviction that Mrs. Minton's arrival had lessened the chances of its replenishment.

"Oh, but I mean, you know, just now particularly. Why, supposing you had let Miss Moville get drowned, or catch a bad cold—why you would never have been able to hold up your head again," said that lady, laughing with great enjoyment of an invisible joke.

"And you would have been afraid to meet Lord Sandgate, or perhaps he would have killed you in a duel," added Lucilla, giggling chorus.

Archie looked at her, and said absolutely nothing.

"Pray, what has Lord Sandgate to do with the matter?" I inquired.

Mrs. Minton turned to me with relief at finding a free channel opened to her news.

"Oh, why, didn't you know that she is engaged to him? I mean, Miss Moville is engaged to Lord Sandgate. He is the eldest son of the Earl of Heaton, a very wealthy man, you know. It's a great match for her, for though her father was a viscount, everybody knows that he left them as poor as church mice. But then Lord Anderton is going to settle £5,000 on her on the wedding-day, and leave her all his property."

"I think that is all a mistake," I said.

"Of course you are surprised not to have heard it; and indeed, as you are so intimate with Lady Jacobs, I wonder she didn't tell you. But the news is only just out, and I suppose she hadn't authority. When I saw Miss Moville go off in that way with Mr. Rintoul, I *must* own that I did not know how to believe my eyes; it was such a very *marked* thing to do, you know: but then when I heard this news, I said to Lucilla, that *quite* explains it. When a girl is engaged, she can do things that she couldn't before, and naturally she likes to use her liberty while it lasts. I don't think any the worse of her for it."

"I am sure Miss Moville would be obliged to you for your kind indulgence," I remarked, unable to keep an edge off my tongue; "but I am sure too that she will not be at all obliged to you if you spread this story. From something that passed yesterday evening, I am convinced that there is no truth whatever in it."

"I hope I am not in the habit of spreading stories that have no truth whatever in them," said Mrs. Minton, rising slowly, with insulted dignity. "No one hates gossip more than I do; but when a girl does things which are not comme il faut, I think it is only *kind* to mention the excuses that there are for her. That was all I meant to do; and as for the engagement, every one knows of it in London. You will

find it to be true, Mrs. Singleton. I don't *wonder* that you are annoyed; but it is much better to look at things as they are, and not deceive ourselves."

They took themselves away then; Archie showed them out with elaborate politeness, and then vanished. I wanted to pour out to him my indignation and incredulity, and to rave against these mischief-makers—but he came not. So I went to church alone, and fumed through most of the prayers and all the sermon, finding my only consolation in building romances of faith and constancy triumphing over slanderous tongues.

He could not escape me in the evening, however; and though there was no sitting by the river that night, I took my opportunity under the prosaic circumstances of books and candles in the drawing-room.

"Archie," I began, without preface, "you don't believe a word of that woman's gossip?"

"I don't know," he answered, moodily.

"Didn't you see that it was mere spite and malice? If you had heard her and her daughter talk last night before they went away, you would know that they would make any mischief they could."

"That's well enough; but where did they get their story from? They didn't invent it, I suppose?"

"Well, they would not be quite equal to that, I dare say; but they would turn a rumour into a certainty if it suited their purpose, and if Lord Sandgate is an admirer of Imogen, there might have been some gossip to work on."

"I dare say he is: I've seen him round about, and dancing with her. Of course it's just the match that her people want to make for her, and nothing is more likely than that they have made it."

"Nothing more likely! After last night! Archie, how can you insult her so?"

"I don't insult her. I know her heart can't be in it, if it is so; but if her step-mother and uncle have made up their minds, how is a girl to resist? They'll make her life a burden to her until she gives in; and what is she to do? I don't blame her."

"Upon my word, you are as gracious as Mrs. Minton herself. And, pray, should you not blame her for behaving as she did to you yesterday, if she were engaged to some one else?"

He was silent a moment.

"Perhaps we took that for more than it was worth. She was enjoying herself, and her spirits carried her away. But no, after all, I do believe that she does care for me a little. That makes it a more horrible sacrifice."

"Why should there be any sacrifice? It lies with you to save her."

"I wish it did. But it would not be honourable for me to put myself and my poverty between her and a brilliant fate, and ask her to quarrel with her friends for my sake. At any rate, I must wait to

see what comes of this Sandgate affair, and avoid compromising her again."

"So the days of romance are over!" I cried.

"Why, what do you want me to do?"

"Just to ignore all this gossip, and come down next Saturday, and behave as if you had never heard it. Take up matters where you left them last night, and all will be well."

"Well, I'll come down at any rate, and if the story is really true, of course she won't come here again—or else I shall know it at once by her manner."

"The story is not true," I said, positively. "Mind you don't spend the week in brooding over it, and come down on Saturday ready primed for a misunderstanding."

"All right, auntie, I'll try to be as hopeful as you are."

"Try to have faith in Imogen," I replied. "That will be more to the purpose. I have only seen her twice, and I trust her more than you do, already."

He made no answer, but went off to his nightly pipe, and next morning returned to London, where I fear he forgot to attend to Mrs. Minton's parcel.

On Wednesday I had a note from him.

"The engagement of which we heard on Sunday is announced in the *Olla Podrida* with all particulars. Of course such paragraphs are often lies, but in this case the confirmation is significant. Under the circumstances, I think I had better return to my first intentions, and I have arranged to go down into Kent for Sunday. If you hear anything, let me know."

I tore the note into bits, I was so angry. To give up his love on the strength of a paragraph in a Society paper! To be sure, even he would scarcely have done so if it had not come as a confirmation of the Mintons' story; but then, what did the Mintons know about it? Why, they took the *Olla Podrida*. And it came out on Saturday! Now it was all clear. They had opened it when they went home that evening, and found this delicious tit-bit of gossip to console them for the vexations of the afternoon. So their part of the business went for nothing. I dashed off a hasty reply.

"Dear Archie,—There is no confirmation at all. The Mintons take the *Olla Podrida*, and evidently got their story from it. You ought to know what its authority is worth better than I do. At any rate, you promised me to come down on Saturday, and I hold you to your promise. If you break it, you will vex and offend

"Your affectionate aunt,

"Vera Singleton."

"There!" I said to myself as I directed it. "I am nearly worn out with the boy's pride and nonsense and self-tormenting ways. I

would just let him spoil his life after his own fashion, if it were not spoiling Imogen's too ; but she shall have a chance of making him ashamed of himself. And if one look of those brown eyes of hers does not make him forget all the rubbish that ever was printed, and all the gossip that those Mintons would talk between now and Christmas—why, it will be because he is a fool ! "

V.

I AWOKE on Saturday morning, with a hazy sense of something going to happen, which soon solidified into the remembrance that this day would decide the fate of my nephew and his ladye-love. I pulled up the blind eagerly, anxious to look in the face a day which was bringing gifts, good or evil, to one (if not two) whom I loved, and try to guess its burden. In vain ; there was no stealing its secrets ; it wore no smile of encouragement, nor gloom of evil augury ; there never was a more uncommunicative day.

Of course I watched at the window anxiously to see if Archie would really keep his promise. The train was late, and I had had a long interval of looking out and heartbreaking before he came in sight, and I dropped into a chair with a sigh of relief. He had come, but it was in no hopeful mood ; he was grave, composed, and silent. I did not venture to allude to our correspondence, and only said :

" I am so glad you have come."

" As you insisted upon it, I was bound to do so," he replied. " And on the whole I believe it is the fair and right thing to do."

The time passed heavily until my guests began to arrive, and more heavily still from the first arrival until Lady Jacobs's carriage drove up. All three ladies were in it. Imogen had had a less stormy week than either she or her friend had anticipated. When they returned last Saturday, Lady Anderton had really been asleep, and never knew exactly when they came in. Of course the subject was ignored next day, and peace was restored. Lady Jacobs, being perfectly certain that the Mintons would call on Monday, arranged a long drive for that afternoon, and did not set out on it early. Her secret triumph when she saw their cards lying on the hall-table at her return was the more intense that she could not share it even with Imogen, and she chuckled with glee over their disappointment, and the unlikeliness of their having another chance of making mischief. Lady Anderton was terribly afraid of a scene until it was begun, when she thoroughly enjoyed it, and could work herself up to as high a pitch of fictitious excitement as any woman ; and she had no desire for another such headache as she had brought upon herself the previous Saturday. So she took the wiser course of making no difficulty about Imogen's accompanying her hostess this afternoon ; but had come herself in charge, ready to be Argus and Medusa in one, and prove herself worthy of the house of Moville, and the confidence of its head.

Archibald received the tips of Lady Anderton's primrose-gloved fingers, and I not much more, though she was determinedly polite to me. Oh, yes, she would take some tea, and so would her daughter, she was sure; they were confirmed tea-drinkers. And what a pretty place this was, and how near the river—so nice! She must really walk all round it presently; she would not take up so much of my time, but Imogen knew it and would show her the way. Archie handed tea and cake; but when he spoke to her step-daughter, Lady Anderton always answered, making herself a kind of mitrailleuse of commonplaces, and keeping all attacks at a distance with the pelting discharge. Imogen sat silent and pale, with an angry compression of the lips. At last I asked her if she would like to play tennis, but again her duenna interposed:

"I can't spare her *quite* yet, Mrs. Singleton, please. I want to have my promised walk round your dear little place. Then she shall have a game, if she doesn't think it too hot."

"I should be quite pleased to do the honours of my little greenhouse to you. I don't think Miss Moville knows her way there, and some of my ferns are really good."

"Oh, thank you, it will be so kind of you to show them to us. I doat on ferns, but I never can remember their names; Imogen knows all about them, though."

There was no freeing her, and we three walked off on our rounds. I tried to let Imogen drop behind, that Archie might come up to her; but she would not manœuvre, and he remained lounging disconsolately by the deserted tea-table. We made our dull circuit, an uncomfortable party. At last the promenade could no longer be spun out without my active co-operation, and we returned to the seats under the trees. Archibald was not visible, and Lady Anderton relaxed guard, and began talking to old Mr. Merton. Imogen sat and fanned herself, and I let her alone. Presently Archibald came up to us looking graver than ever. He stood near and did not seem to know what to say. Imogen fanned herself faster, she glanced at him, and his changed and chilled mood breathed subtly on her. Her face changed too, and her mouth took a steadier set, as if guarding itself against any betrayal of emotion. I felt the oppression of the silence, and broke it at last by asking him if he was going on the river that afternoon.

"If Miss Moville will go with me," he answered. "Will you?" he said to her suddenly, almost sternly.

She hesitated. "I am not sure; I think ——"

Lady Anderton turned sharply round. "Are you talking of going on the water? Oh, my dear Imogen, I could not think of allowing it. I am so nervous; I should be miserable until you came back. Besides, here is Mrs. Minton, and I want you to talk to her; you know we were out when she called."

Archibald turned on his heel and went off with a stride; he stood

watching the tennis, and soon afterwards I saw him playing with unusual energy. Mrs. Minton rustled up, all silk and beads, and fluttering flowers, and scented pocket handkerchief.

"*Dear* Lady Anderton, I am *so* glad to see you at *last;* I was *so* sorry to miss you on Monday. And when you are here so seldom! And I *did* want Lucilla to make Miss Moville's acquaintance—they would be such *nice* friends for each other. Here on Saturday, of course, *we* saw nothing of her."

Lady Anderton responded with less effusiveness, and Imogen found it superfluous to add anything to the stream of words. It foamed for some time round the interesting topics of the date of the Andertons' arrival, the length of their stay, the object and exact duration of the drive which had defrauded them of Mrs. Minton's visit; and then there was a slight pause, which gave the latter lady a starting-point for a new cascade.

"And of course we wanted *so* much to congratulate Miss Moville, and you too, dear Lady Anderton. It must be *such* a relief to your mind, and you must be *so* proud. Not but that the other party ought to be prouder, and no doubt he is; but still—you know. Of course it is a most *suitable* arrangement, nothing could be better; but you *must* let me congratulate you, my dear. I am sure you are *very* happy." And she laid her fat fingers—sparkling with rings—upon Imogen's hand. Imogen drew it away.

"I cannot imagine what you mean, Mrs. Minton," she said, in absolutely freezing tones.

"Ought I not to have mentioned it? But *really*, you know, when it is in the papers, you cannot expect your friends to treat it as a secret. *Can* she now?" asked Mrs. Minton, turning to Lady Anderton.

"I am afraid I must ask for an explanation, too," said Lady Anderton, glancing nervously at Imogen.

"Why, Miss Moville's engagement to Lord Sandgate was in Saturday's *Olla Podrida* with all particulars, as a positive fact," Mrs. Minton declared, growing fussed.

"It is very annoying," Lady Anderton answered, "very annoying indeed. Such reports do so much mischief. It is quite premature, and I beg you will not repeat it."

"It is much more than premature," struck in Imogen, angrily; "there is not the slightest foundation for it. There never was; there never will be. I will have it contradicted at once. Mrs. Minton, will you kindly do so if you ever hear the subject mentioned?"

"Really, I am very sorry," replied Mrs. Minton, somewhat abashed. "I thought it such a nice thing, and so likely to be true. It is a great pity."

Imogen could bear no more, and left her to trickle as much of the sweetened vinegar of her condolences and apologies over Lady Anderton as the latter was willing to bear, or unable to defend herself from. She wandered down to the river by herself, and her

step-mother, seeing Archie safely disposed of, did not think it necessary to pursue her. Poor girl! she was thoroughly miserable. Ever since last Saturday she had been living on remembrance and hope; she and Archie understood each other at last; he loved her —there was no doubt of it now, and she was saved. They had pledged faith in music, as they looked into each other's eyes; he had sworn to rescue her, and the warm clasp of his strong hand lingered still on hers. Now, at last, this weary untrue life of scheming and fretting would be over, and something genuine would be hers instead—she scarcely knew what, except that it would be with him. But here they were within a few steps of each other—all but together, and yet as far apart as if all the tides of London were as usual roaring between them.

Gossip was busy with her name; doubtless Archibald too had heard this story, and it explained his altered bearing. He must think her a flirt—a double flirt. Oh, how could it have arisen? She herself was sure that Lord Anderton was the fountain-head. He was so thoroughly certain that whatever he decided must come to pass that if he were asked questions on the matter, he would rather let it be supposed that all was arranged, than admit the possibility that his pet scheme should fail. He might even have gone farther, and deliberately allowed the report to grow, in order to make her feel bound, and tempt her into committing herself by consenting to such half-denials as her step-mother would be sure to make. That at least he should not do; she had foiled him, and would foil him. But now the help she had trusted to had failed her, and a blank future, filled only with reproaches and repining, stretched again its sandy wastes before her. As she stood by the river, drearily watching the bits of decaying water-weed float down, she suddenly noticed a canoe moored to the bank among the pleasure boats. It was Archie's, but she did not know this, or notice the painted name: she stepped in, and was soon in the middle of the river, working her way up stream with exertion that relieved her irritated misery, and at every stroke leaving a wider and wider stretch of silent soothing water between her and the troublesome world.

Archibald played tennis diligently and desperately all that afternoon. Regardless of other people's rights, as fast as one game was ended he invited another trio to join him, and began again playing eagerly—almost wildly, with an insistance upon his own opinion on disputed points, and a want of temper, most unlike his usual quiet good manners. Mrs. Lingard was his partner at last, and was really distressed by the evidences of something wrong; and when the game was over, she asked him to take a turn round the garden with her, making it impossible for him to refuse. He walked by her side moodily until they came to a convenient place on the bank, where they sat down. For a time very few words were spoken, but

Archibald's excited mood died away under Rhoda's soothing companionship; and though he did not give her any confidence, he roused himself to put aside his own affairs, and began to talk to her about some of her husband's, in which he was much interested. It was already late in the afternoon when they established themselves there, and they had had time for a long conversation, when a hand was laid on Archie's shoulder, and Lady Jacobs said hurriedly:

"Mr. Rintoul, where is Miss Moville?"

He scarcely looked round, and answered:

"I don't know; I have hardly seen her this afternoon."

"Oh, where can she be? We can't find her; and this place is so small, she cannot be lost. Nearly every one has gone away, and she wouldn't go home alone."

Archie sprang to his feet, and faced the poor old lady, flushed and distressed.

"Where has she been? She must have been talking to some one. Who saw her last?"

"I can't make out that any one has seen her for ever so long. Mrs. Minton said something which annoyed her, and she walked away, and after that no one knows anything about her. To tell the truth, I thought she was with you, not seeing either of you, and I hindered Lady Anderton from looking for her. Oh!" beginning to cry, "I hope I have not killed the dear child!"

"Dear Lady Jacobs," Rhoda interposed, "there is no reason to be so much frightened. Very likely Miss Moville has gone for a row with somebody, and they have forgotten how late it is. If Mr. Rintoul were to take his canoe, and go out on the river, he might see something of them, and hurry them back."

"That's the very thing," said Archie, and dashed off to the little landing-place, the other two hurrying after him. I met him there, just as he stopped short, and exclaimed:

"It's not here! She's gone out in it!"

"Somebody else might have taken it," I said, feeling my heart sink as I remembered the talk of the other night. "Let me count the other boats. No; they are all right."

"Then the only boat missing is the canoe; and she is missing; and she can't swim," exclaimed Archie, wildly.

"That is no reason why she should be upset," I said; "she is well accustomed to manage it."

"Not on a river where there are steam-launches."

"I don't think there have been any this afternoon."

"One went up about an hour ago," put in Lucilla, in a tearful quaver.

"Oh, my child!" shrieked Lady Anderton.

"A steam-launch is not sentence of death," said Rhoda, with some asperity. "Instead of our all standing here talking, it would be much

better if we set to work to look for her. Here are the boatmen and Mr. Rintoul; some might go up the river and some down."

"Right," said Archie, pulling off his coat, and throwing it into a light boat.

"Stop, sir," said one of the boatmen; "what's that coming down?"

Something floating in the sunny upper reaches of the river caught our eyes with a sudden gleam of light brown.

"The canoe!" I exclaimed. "But no; it is not large enough."

"Is it she? Tell me, is it Imogen?" cried Lady Anderton, clutching my arm.

"I don't see her yet," I said, "the sun is in my eyes."

The spot came on, now dark in a bright stretch of water, now bright in a shadow, widening, narrowing, changing shape. Impossible to make out what it was. *How* slowly it came, lingering down the stream! why did she not make haste? It is nearer now; it certainly is the colour of the canoe; but ought we not to see the flash of the merry paddle? Archie leaped into the boat, and pushed off: the boatmen followed him in theirs without a word. The oars bent, as the boats leaped under the strong strokes; and yet those minutes seemed endless until they reached the floating mass. We watched them draw up to it, and saw the men stoop over and handle it. Then the confused group separated: Archie pulled up stream harder than ever, and the men turned, and came back to us. One of them rowed, the other held what they drew after them. We could see it now; they had turned it right side up; it was Archie's canoe!

"What is it? Oh, what is it?" Lady Anderton screamed.

Nobody answered her. We all saw; and as the men tied the ill-fated boat in its place again, they pulled out from the bottom, where it lay jammed and soaked, a silk parasol.

Lady Anderton screamed again, and fainted. We took her into the house, with the help of two elderly gentlemen and the maids, and there Lady Jacobs and I brought her round. Then of course she began to sob, so I left her to her friend, and came out again to the landing-place. There I found Rhoda sitting, pale, and full of anxious pity—Lucilla cowering close to her, conscience-stricken and crushed, yet not able to go—and kind Mr. Merton pacing the gravel walk with the doctor whom he had thoughtfully fetched.

"As your maid, Mrs Singleton, told me that Lady Anderton had recovered consciousness, I thought that I had better not go upstairs unless you needed me," said the doctor, meeting me as I approached.

"Thank you," I said heavily; "Lady Jacobs is with her, and there seems nothing the matter but the agitation. Where are the boatmen?"

"Gone after Mr. Rintoul," answered Mr. Merton. "There is, of course, no use in looking down stream now."

We all sat there, waiting, waiting, watching, starting at every speck in the distance on the stream, constantly deceived by boats in which

we had no interest, and for which we at once felt a perfect hatred. Sometimes Mr. Merton hailed them, and inquired if they had seen anything of our boats; perhaps they had spoken to them going up, perhaps they had seen nothing of them,—at any rate they had no news. After a time, Lady Anderton came wandering out, leaning on Lady Jacobs's arm, restless and haggard: her hair was in her swollen eyes, her face was miserably distorted with crying, her lace shawl crumpled up under a woollen one which her friend had thrown round her, as the evening was now chilly: she looked years older, and my heart softened with pity to the unhappy woman. I went to meet them, and took them to a seat a little apart from the rest.

"I could not stay indoors," she moaned. "I must come out and watch too. After all, she may not be drowned; don't you think so, Mrs. Singleton? There is some hope: isn't there some hope?"

"Surely there is hope," I said, as cheerfully as I could. "She might have been picked up when the canoe was upset; it is not likely to have overturned by itself! and if it was run down by a boat or a steam-launch, there would be people on the spot to help."

"Oh, but people are so often drowned even when there *is* help," said the poor lady, wringing her hands. "No; she's drowned; I shall never see her again. Oh, and I have been so unkind to her! But I meant it for the best."

"I am sure you did," I said, soothingly.

"Yes, but it was not really for the best," Lady Jacobs interposed, sternly. "Don't you see now, Constantia, how wrong it was to hunt and harry the poor girl, to try and make her sell herself to a man she didn't like, and keep her from the one she did like? If you had let her be happy with Mr. Rintoul this afternoon, she would be safe now."

I thought this cruel; and Lady Anderton wept piteously.

"Oh yes, it is true. I am the murderer of my child! oh, call me a murderer! I have killed her!" and hysterics again impended.

"Hush, Constantia," Lady Jacobs resumed, with a controlling force which I should not have suspected in her. "Keep yourself quiet for what you may have to bear. But I want you to promise, now that you see things as they are, that if even yet it should please Heaven to send Imogen back to you, you will let her be happy in her own way."

"Oh, indeed I promise; oh, if she should come back, she shall do whatever she likes. I will never let her uncle come inside the house, if she wishes. But she will never come back: oh, my child!"

And the weary round of tears and lamentations began again. We had no consolation to offer, and little hope; and so we sat and waited on, while the evening darkened round us, and the willows whispered chillily.

VI.

After the discovery of the canoe, Archibald started off, rowing as fast as he possibly could, and shouting every now and then. Very soon, however, he realised that a long search might be before him, and that he must economise his strength; also, that a few minutes were not likely to make any difference, whether the worst had happened, or whether Imogen had in some way escaped. He began therefore to search methodically, rowing at a reasonable pace, and exploring both banks of the river. While he was going up a backwater, the boatmen overtook him; and each boat taking one side of the stream, they went on in company. Archie did not know how the time passed, but he seemed to live years in that awful search. Up they went, peering into every corner. What was that under the little bridge? Nothing but the shadow on a clump of rushes. Round that island there is a current; anything brought down by the stream might lodge there. No; there was only a heap of foam. Besides, if it were so, she would not be likely to be floated down.

How strong the stream was! how slowly they passed the familiar banks! Stop; what was that, caught under a willow, swaying slowly in a swirl close to the bank? All the men caught sight of it at the same time, and bent to their oars. Archibald had been at the other side of the river, and the boatmen were first close to the dark moving heap. One of them took his oar out of the water.

"Bless yer, sir," said the man; "it's a sheep: that's what it is!"

He turned back to his own shore, feeling as if he had been wrenched in pieces. His hands literally shook, and for a minute he could not pull a stroke; but the horror of feeling himself drifting back restored his self-control, and again he rowed up stream.

"'Tis not half-a-mile to the lock, now," remarked one of the men. "She can't have gone beyond that."

Only half-a-mile more of hope! They came to a wide stretch with grassy banks at each side. Here they could easily see whatever was to be seen, and they moved faster. The lock must be near now and there they might hear some terrible news, or come up against a blank hard wall of despair.

Round a bend now; were they coming to the lock at this turn? Not yet; here was one of those innumerable willow-covered islets that stud the Thames. They had spent much time on their slow progress, and it was growing dusk; but surely there was something light upon it—something that moved. Archie tried to shout, but his voice would not come; he made one great effort, and it sounded aloud, but hoarse and changed.

"Halloo!"

"Here!" rang the clear reply.

A few tremendous strokes brought him to the islet. He sprang out of his boat, and clasped Imogen in his arms.

"My darling! You are safe."

"Oh yes, quite safe," she murmured. But I think the safety that she felt was not that of dry land, but of her lover's breast.

So they stood for a few perfect eternal moments—moments which brought with them no sense of time, and which would be immortal, ever ready to be lived over again. The world was far away; they were at last each other's, alone together in the river and the gathering twilight. When the answer came to Archie's call, the boatmen rested on their oars, and smiled a quiet smile at each other; then they intercepted Archie's boat, which was floating away unheeded; and if they took a glance now and then at what was going on upon the island, why, it was only human nature—and after all, as the willows were high, and the light was fading, perhaps they did not see much.

Imogen was naturally the first to return to this sublunary scene. When men do make fools of themselves, they do it much more completely than women, who seldom quite forget the external world, especially if it has eyes. Roused by her, Archie looked for his boat, and with some confusion of face signalled to the men, who had it in safe custody, and brought it up with suppressed satisfaction.

"Glad to see you safe, miss," said one of them, touching his hat.

"Thank you for coming to look for me," answered Imogen, pleasantly. "Did you think I was drowned?" she asked, turning to Archie.

"Indeed we did," he replied, gravely. "Of course I clung to hope, but when we came so high up the river, it became very faint."

"This was the highest point I reached," she explained. "There were some grand bulrushes growing on the island and in the water close to it, and I wanted them for winter nosegays. One particularly fine one I could not get at from the water, because the trunk of an old willow was in the way; so I got out, and pulled the canoe, as I thought, safely up on the bank—not quite out of the water, though. Then, while I was round on the other side of the island, one of those horrid steam-launches came past, and the wash of it carried off the canoe. When I came back, it was floating out of reach. Oh, I did feel so lost. But let us be off, and set poor mamma's mind at ease. I can tell you the rest in the boat."

"Yes," said Archie; "we will go at once. My men, you must be tired and thirsty. I'll take Miss Moville home, and you can get a glass of beer at the Swan. I'll give you something better to remember this day by when I get back."

"Oh, my bulrushes!" cried Imogen: "I can't leave them behind."

"Why not?" demanded Archie. "I shall hate the sight of them."

"Then you need not look at them. I am not so ungrateful; I shall try and find out some process to make them last for ever."

"After all, I believe I am grateful to them," he said, coming back with the costly weeds. "I don't know how long I might have gone

on behaving like an idiot, and making myself miserable with distrusting my darling, if it hadn't been for the terror they cost me. But I hope you will never make me live through such an afternoon again."

"I never will, indeed," promised Imogen.

They sped down the river, the banks sliding swiftly past them as stream and oar carried them home. You will not ask to hear what they said to each other, if I could tell; and if I had been listening, I would not be such a traitor.

The pale and shivering group of watchers at the landing-place had not moved. Lady Anderton had wept herself torpid, and was leaning against Lady Jacobs in a sort of exhausted doze. I felt worn out too, and had ceased to strain my eyes through the dusk, when Rhoda said in a low, excited tone:

"I hear oars!"

"It may not be our boats," I said wearily; but I roused myself as the sound came nearer. The creak of the straining rowlocks, the quick splash, had something peculiar in their sound of haste which awakened us all. The boat grew out of the dark water; we all sprang to our feet as it glided near, and Imogen cried out before we could see her:

"Mamma, I am here!"

Lady Anderton rushed down the little wooden steps, and nearly precipitated herself into the boat. Archie caught her, and held her up while Imogen sprang out and threw her arms round her; and then there ensued a confusion of embraces and handshakings, out of which Archie emerged, sure that he had been kissed by Rhoda, not at all sure that he had not been kissed by Lady Anderton, and only certain that he had escaped Lucilla. He remarked afterwards that it was good practice for getting married, and he should now be quite hardened to anything that might happen on his wedding-day.

Poor Lucilla, indeed, was not in a mood to be formidable to anybody. She was horribly ashamed of her conduct in the whole affair; and after giving Imogen one hearty kiss, slipped away without saying anything to anyone else. It did her good on the whole; she was much quieter, and consequently more ladylike, afterwards; and I never saw another piece of spitefulness. Mr. Merton and the doctor took their departure—the latter in his heart somewhat disappointed that he had not had an opportunity of "bringing round" Miss Moville. Rhoda had run away to her own house next door, as soon as the kissing was over; and the rest of us went in to compose our minds and recruit our bodies with the one universal solvent—Tea. Imogen smoothed Lady Anderton's ruffled plumage, and settled her on the sofa, where she cared for her with a tender daughterliness that I think was new to both, and which probably owed something to a few hasty words gasped out between sobs and kisses. Archibald hovered round them, waiting on both in a somewhat different fashion from the formal attendance of the afternoon. At last we heard Imogen's story connectedly, as it has been already told.

"I should have thought you would have been taken off almost at once," said Lady Jacobs; "there are always such hosts of boats on the river."

"There did not seem to be as many as usual to-day," she answered; "and then I know I was stupid. If you will believe me, it never once occurred to me that I could get an up-going boat to take me across to the bank, and walk home. I only thought of going back as I had come, and concluded that there was no use in hailing boats that were going up stream."

"Well, my dear, I never should have suspected you of being such a goose," said Lady Jacobs; "but even so, how was it that you did not make any of the down-going boats hear?"

"As I tell you, there were not very many of them; and at first, until matters grew serious, I was shy, and looked at each of them to see if I could go rowing in company with the people in them, and I didn't like the looks of them, and thought it would be so awkward; and so I waited for a boatful of prepossessing people, and it never came. At last I knew you would all be getting frightened if I didn't come back; so I made up my mind to call out to the next one, but when it came, the men in it were half-tipsy, and I really couldn't. Then it began to grow dark, and no more passed; and I thought I was in for a night on the island."

"Poor child, you must have been dreadfully frightened," said Lady Anderton, pityingly.

"Oh no, I wasn't. If it had not been for thinking of you all, and your anxiety, I should have rather enjoyed it. It would have been an experience. At least I should have enjoyed it if I had had a rug and a shawl. It threatened to be a chilly experience when the river-mist began to cling round the willows."

Lady Anderton shivered with sympathy.

"I am quite warm now, mamma," laughed Imogen. "The wind has changed, I think."

"Yes," said Archie, who was leaning against the window, as we had all now finished tea. "It is quite a fine night. The clouds are all gone, and the stars are shining. Come out and see them."

"Mamma," said the girl, dreamily, "Archie says that the clouds are all gone, and the stars are shining, and I am to come out and see them. May I go?"

"Yes, dear; go, and God bless you," said Lady Anderton, drawing her down for a kiss.

So Archie and his ladye-love stepped out together into the presence of the steadfast stars.

VERA SINGLETON.

THE FAIR OF CUERS.

By the Author of "Life in Provence."

FAIR Provence is still my theme. And why not? Is it not the loveliest of all lovely countries, and are there not hundreds of thousands who will dream themselves in it if only they can get a faithful painter to represent it before them? Hundreds of thousands, who may not visit it in the body, will yet explore it in the spirit with me.

Then, off we go, on October 28, 1881, to a fair to buy a horse, and we travel by road in order to examine well the country through which we pass. The morning is not fine, neither is it wet, but it hovers between the two, which to us is quite a novelty. Since June 4th we have not had even a shower of rain and certainly not a wet day since February the 1st. To-day we may have a rainfall which may stop the fair, but when once the horse is hired it is not worth while to turn back.

Our road runs between the Black Mountain and Paradise to La Cran. The Black Mountain lowers over the sea, but Paradise is of course removed from it: there is no sea there, nor may it be seen except from the summit, which fact I propose to you as a riddle and a parable.

La Cran is a thriving little town, almost wholly devoted to cork-cutting. The cork oak is our most valuable forest tree, yielding as it does its bark every three years to the knife of the cork merchant, at a very high price indeed. This bark strips off easily enough in large sheets, and probably would fall as does the bark of the Eucalyptus, if it were not sought after and removed before decay can commence.

There are plenty of well-built, lofty stone houses in La Cran, which proclaim either acquired independence or a flourishing business—that is, if large houses mean anything, for I confess myself quite perplexed with this one question. Here, in Provence, I am continually visiting or passing through towns and villages, whose streets are almost silent, where there is no external evidence of trade, but which are largely populated and can boast of buildings which would be considered costly in London and could only be occupied by well-to-do people.

Now, this is the question: How do these people get a living? Make all due allowance for the notaries, the doctor, the juge de paix and other officials, and yet there must remain in those houses of four and five stories suites of apartments suitable only for those whose means are assured. There is only one answer which I can suggest. Provence is so rich that each town and village contains a far larger

proportion of propriétaires, who live on their rents, than any other province.

After leaving La Cran, the road runs through an immense plain planted with olive trees and hemmed in by mountains. The greater part of this plain is the property of one family whose seat is the château of "La Castille," which it will be our pleasure to visit on our return from the fair. A great deal of the land is poor, and since the vines have perished the farmer struggles hard for a living, where in the good old days he had but to gather and press the rich wine.

It is pleasant enough to roll over a good road in an easy carriage amidst lovely scenery, especially when at every two or three miles distance there is the excitement of a large village or small town. Once over this plain of La Castille, we are amidst the rushing waters of Sollies-Pont, where they raise the lucerne and the hay which supplies the whole country-side, besides growing primeurs for the Paris market, which some people say are passed off as the product of that wonderful place, Carqueiranne.

The present town is in the valley, while its mother, who is as old as the days of the Saracens, still lives on in decrepid old age, perched up in the skies on the mountain side. The ancient Sollies is a fair ruin, which seems to consist entirely of a large fortified church, but on closer inspection there appears clinging to the sides of the spiritual asylum the little temporal abodes of the few inhabitants who still remain; and round about the whole mass there are remnants of walls, turrets and fortifications.

Originally, all the inhabitants of the littoral, with its chain of mountains, now called the "Maures," were clustered together in fortified burgs on the mountains, whence they descended by day to work in the plains, returning, ere it was dark, to their homes. After the strong hand of Rome had become paralysed, the Moors of North Africa, and notably the pirates of Algiers, seized upon their possessions along the northern coasts of the Mediterranean. In their palmy days they settled the country, but as Europe pressed them back, they had to withdraw into fortified cities among the mountains, from which they rather raided than colonised the land. When at last they retired altogether, their successors occupied their towns; nor did these dare to spread themselves abroad until quite modern days, for the pirates made such frequent descents upon the coast as to render life one continual warfare. Tradition says that on one of these occasions the corsairs netted a whole convent of nuns, whom they carried off to stock the harems of Algiers. The tale is romantic, and coincides, in point of time, with the dissolute period of monastic history.

A very young and noble lady abbess ruled over a convent on the coast facing the Isles of Hyères. Finding herself rather dull in such an out-of-the-way spot, the idea struck her that it would be fine fun to toll the large alarm-bell, which was only used on occasions of

pressing danger to summon the faithful to defend the convent. This she did twice, and twice she improvised a fête for the delectation of her ennuyéd sisters. But on the third occasion, when the pirates really had arrived in the dead of the night, and she tolled the alarm, nobody paid any attention to her summons, for, although it was good fun enough to spend a happy day at the convent, there seemed no special attraction for such a journey during the darkness of night. The result was that the poor ladies were all captured, and, with the exception of three aged females, who were not suitable for the slave market, were never heard of again. These three women took refuge at Hyères, where they lived in peace until nature closed the scene.

In each and all of the existing towns there are châteaux, factories, tanneries, and other evidences of ease, if not of wealth. All the farmers are well-to-do, all the inhabitants healthy, well dressed, and prosperous.

As we proceeded along our road to Cuers the rain fell in torrents. This would be but the rule of things in Brittany, nor would it in the least disturb the steady march of men, women and cattle to the fair; but here, in Provence, it is a different matter altogether. It may be that the climate makes the people soft and sensitive, for certain it is that the stoutest labourer will cease work at once for a few drops of rain. And yet they may be right, for warm climates become really dangerous when the parched earth is suddenly wetted, as I know to my cost. Since living here I have been particularly careful not to expose myself to a ducking; for well do I remember the day when first I caught the fever, which has never wholly left me since. It was not in Provence, but in Syria, amidst the ruins of Baalbec, that I gained my dearly-bought experience. After a pleasant ride through the mountains of Lebanon, I was walking through Baalbec with a Scotchman (an old Syrian settler), when it began to spit rain. My companion warned me to seek shelter without delay; but I, used to the climate of England, smiled at his counsel and kept on my way. Suddenly, when stooping to pick up a curved stone fallen from the frieze, I trembled like an aspen leaf; my teeth chattered; I ran to my tent, jumped into bed, covered myself with rugs, but in vain. The bed shook with the violence of my convulsive shivering, and I was in for the fever, which almost cost me my life and quite ruined my constitution.

Well, to return to our visit to the fair, we were on a road where shelter was impossible; but we were in a covered carriage, and the driver was well provided with wraps. The effect of the storm upon the landscape was marvellous. So rapidly did the rain fall, so hard was the earth, that it seemed as if we were driving through a shallow sea. The horse splashed on, mists rose up all around, the mountains were obscured, the sensation was miserable. Fortunately for the Provençals, they are early risers, so that but a few laggards felt the

evil effects of the rain. These rolled themselves up in their Arab-looking striped cloaks, with capotes drawn over their caps, and submitted to destiny. It was over when we reached Cuers, but the glory of the day had departed. The sun shone out again, and did its best to restore our spirits while we bivouacked in the carriage and discussed a cold veal-and-ham pie, looking meanwhile with regret at the water and slush beneath our friendly wheels.

The fair of Cuers is a cattle fair, so we looked about for some market-place, or open space, to which they had been driven, hoping to come upon a lively scene of buying and selling and clapping of hands over bargains, as in the north of France. Nothing of the sort was to be seen; and, for such a lively people, the quiet way in which they transact business is remarkable. The horses and mules and donkeys (for of horned cattle there was not a single head), were arranged in long rows within stables or barns fitted up for the purpose, something like the stables at Tattersalls', while each dealer presided over his own lot, holding in his hands a whip with a long lash, with which from time to time he touched them up to keep them alive and make them look bright.

Some of the higher class mules were splendid animals, standing nearly seventeen hands high, and possessed of a power far beyond that of any horse. The price of such animals is very high, if they are young, as they are reared in the Pyrenees, nursed at Avignon, and sold at four or five years old to professional "charretiers," who have constant and heavy work.

The horses were various, some suitable for carriages of the best sort, others with strength of limb, combined with beauty of form, for farm work, when the farmer is rich enough to pay some twelve hundred francs for a beast which can easily draw a couple of tons on a decent road, or trot along with his "jardinière" when he takes his family out. Lastly, there were hacks and poor men's horses of unknown age, some of which were offered as low as two hundred francs, or eight pounds. The animals were from time to time pulled out of their stalls for a trot up one of the narrow lanes, while the buyers, surrounded by a knot of idlers, examined their paces and made their offers; but there was nothing of that loud, lying praise or soft persuasion which is the custom of northern horse-dealers. Indeed, so respectable and so trusted are the leading "maquignons" that, at the advice of a brother of the craft who accompanied us, we bought rather a costly animal upon the assurance of the dealer that it was sound: nor have we yet had occasion to regret our bargain.

It is very curious to observe how there is a social scale for beasts which corresponds with the social scale of mankind. Thus certain men buy certain animals, not choosing solely with a view to utility, but guided by their own social position relatively to that of the beast. The mule is in most respects better for labouring purposes than the

horse, being stronger, more hardy, and more easily nourished; yet no rich farmer would dream of buying a mule for his own use, whereas a struggling man would never think of buying a horse. As for the donkey, here, as everywhere, he is the slave of the very poor, aiding to bring a little amusement into their dull lives: for surely an ass is a droll beast. For my own part, I never can help laughing when I see one leading a team, whether of camels, as at Smyrna, with the Arab's legs dragging the ground, or of mules, as here in Provence. The little creature looks so infinitely important, lifts his dainty little legs like a lady, and never seems to doubt that the huge beasts who follow are under his direct command. Only a few days ago I saw an old miser, who owns a farm in the plains while he lives in a town, after putting a sack on the back of a most diminutive donkey, lift himself on to its back, and start for home with the air of an abbot of long, long ago. Any comic artist would have given much for their photograph. Next day I saw the poor little beast alone in a large stable. He regarded me with such a sedate stare and such evident tranquillity that I felt rebuked at my own impetuosity, and laughed inwardly at both man and beast.

As soon as the horse business was finished, all sallied out on a voyage of discovery with a view to amusement. Accidentally we arrived first at the pig and goat market, this time held in the open air. Our pigs are of good breed, with short legs, long bodies, short noses, curly tails and apoplectic necks. Pig-dealers are familiar people. If you have had dealings with them, however slight, they claim you ever afterwards as a brother of the craft, meet you as a friend, lay hands upon the very pig which is your affair, and even if you say you are no buyer, point out the beauties of their merchandise and call upon you to admire.

In a trice, our particular friend had a squeaker by the hind legs in each hand, swinging in the air and swelling the universal chorus.

"Very nice, but don't want one to-day."

"Don't lose a good chance, sir; sell cheap this wet day, only fifty francs for the pair. How did you like the last? Did very well, eh? Of course they did, real Marseilles breed. Take your fat one off your hands, if you like."

"Well, they are beauties, and if you like to take forty for the pair, you may leave them as you pass our way."

"All right; come to-morrow."

"But how shall I know them again?"

"Put your own mark on them, sir. Philip, lend me a knife. There (cutting off the hair of the neck in the form of a cross), no mistake this time (pitching them back into the cart). Wish you luck, sir."

During this dialogue the buyer had been shaking hands with half-a-dozen neighbouring farmers, who, in a desultory sort of way, had assisted at the deal.

The goats were in clusters of all sorts and sizes. Those with long horns are preferred, as being best able to defend themselves in the flock, for goats are unruly, bad tempered, and violent to one another. With them it is not a word, but a look and a blow. They are uncanny beasts, whereof our experience is not satisfactory, having bought two at a high price and sold them for an old song. At times they give three or even four quarts of milk a day, but they dry up far quicker than cows, and one needs to become accustomed to their milk before one can drink it, nor does it ever become pleasant to the taste. If you have to depend on goats for your milk, you will have to go without from September to the end of January at least, while even early in the summer you will find your three quarts dwindle down to a pint, or even less. When kept in flocks they pay the goatherd, because he leads them all over the country, grazing upon the wild grasses which grow between the stubble, or nibbling the hedges along the roads; whereas, if kept by a private individual they must be fed like a cow or a horse, and they are exceedingly dainty, spoiling far more food than they consume. Their only good point is that they generally have a couple of kids a-year, which are more delicate of flavour than our badly-fed lambs, and come at the end of January.

Tied to a light cart were a pair of the handsomest thorough-bred donkeys in the world, admirably suited for a light carriage, which I should much like to have bought but for two powerful reasons. The first, lack of cash; the second, the shamefacedness natural to English people, who do not like being stared at as they drive about. Yet I remember a very pretty turn-out of that character which either Miss Martineau or Miss Strickland used to drive into Farnham, and which seemed both pretty and useful.

After buying a store of chestnuts for boiling, cabbages for planting, and capons for fatting, we went in for amusement, pure and simple, by entering a large booth devoted to athletics and wrestling. Wrestling seems the chief national amusement from the north to the south of France. The scene about to be described is common to Provence and Brittany at least, and probably to all other parts; but the results of the wrestling are rarely such as it has been my good fortune twice to witness.

The owner of the booth, or circus, has usually two or three professional wrestlers, a heavy, medium, and light weight. As soon as lifting weights, throwing weights, balancing weights, and other such like performances are got through, the wrestlers stand forth and challenge each individual in the crowd to an encounter with whichever of their number he shall himself choose. There is usually some one amongst the audience bold or foolish enough to try his skill, for which daring feat he usually gets a rough mauling and a heavy fall on the sawdust thrown down in the middle of the ring. But on this occasion it seemed the very height of folly for a lad of some nineteen years to accept the challenge, as his appearance was slight and

his form wholly devoid of muscular development. That, however, was his affair, not ours.

Retiring behind a little knot of his companions, he stripped himself completely naked, and remained so, with the exception of a pair of bathing drawers, throughout the encounter. When he appeared on the sawdust, he looked like a lath. Never had we seen a form so utterly devoid of those bunches, or protuberances, on any legs or chest which are usually held to indicate strength. His colour was that of a Red Indian, his appearance that of a lad of seventeen. His professional opponent, on the contrary, was a very mass of muscles, which hung about him like knots, reminding one of the cartoons of Raphael or the paintings of Rubens.

To it they went with a will, at first warily stretching out hands to lay hold of hands, then striking arms or feeling for a grip at the waist. Presently, the professional had his man round the body, and lifted him about like a straw, but somehow he could never throw him fairly down. The youth's feet seemed to feel the ground even when dangling in the air; he turned himself about like a snake, he fell on hands or feet, or laid himself on the ground flat upon his stomach, while the athlete danced round him, pulling, tugging, twisting in vain —for to gain the battle it is necessary to make both the shoulder blades of the fallen foe touch the ground. For a good quarter of an hour the youngster butted like a bull with his head down, slipped out of the most deadly grips, and sometimes threw his adversary with great violence, yet without making his shoulders touch the earth. The professional got wary; he was evidently a little afraid, yet never doubted the final issue of the fray. At last they joined and wrestled furiously, struggled, fell—the youth under the giant; one more turn and it would be all over with the poor boy, when suddenly he caught the athlete round the neck, squeezed, as in a vice, his jugular, lifted him clean up into the air, planted him as flat as a pancake upon his broad back, and rose the victor of as fine a struggle as ever mortal eyes beheld. We pitied the poor professional, for he looked very downcast; but the amateur we admired so much that we offered him money, which he refused, showing that he belonged to the better class, and was no confederate.

Before parting, we made a tour of the town, visiting especially the dark, heavy and gloomy church, which has some points of attraction, from an architectural point of view, although it is ill kept and dirty. One could not help remarking its desolate emptiness, while so many people were congregated outside its walls, especially when one is old enough to remember how, but twenty or thirty years ago, there used to be almost a pile of baskets at the doors of the churches, left there by their owners—the marketing country people—while they said a few prayers before their favourite shrines within. All that seems passed away. Even the women are absent; or, if there, they come but as a faithful remnant, leaving the vast majority behind. Having a peculiar

love of these old churches, and not being at all indifferent to the progress of religion there or elsewhere, I make a practice of visiting them wherever I go, and have done so, for many years past, in many different lands, from the Pro-Cathedral at Kensington to the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem.

Cuers is an old Provençal town, of the type common in the valleys at the mountain foot. It was once fortified, there are still vestiges of its fortifications; it had its feudal baron, there are ruins of his old castle; it still retains its narrow streets, its ins and outs, its third-rate hotels, its commerce in olive oil, and its numerous cattle fairs. It is interesting, as are all these old towns of three or four thousand people, distant from great centres, and worth a passing visit from those who reach it or pass through it while engaged in exploring the lovely country in the midst of which it is placed.

On the road home, we visited the Castle of Castille, and well did it repay us. There is nothing like it in all the Department of the Var. It has peculiar charms—a special beauty all its own—and is apparently open to all who seek its restful, cooling shades, by the kind liberal-mindedness of its proprietor. At any rate, our party wandered in and about, not only without let or hindrance, but aided by those of the servants whom we addressed, without their attempting to thrust themselves upon us unasked.

Its peculiar charm lies in its abundance of rushing waters, which, in a country (this year, at least) without a single shower from May to November, amounts to a natural phenomenon. Imagine what must be the joy of its greenery, when all is parched up elsewhere; what the memories awakened by its old-fashioned water-loving shrubs and flowers, nowhere else to be seen; what the longings of the possessor of a real living cow, at the sight of evergreen pastures!

Passing by one or two flourishing-looking farmhouses, over a bridge which spans the river Gapeau, here lying deep in a rocky gorge, the approach to the château runs alongside an ever-flowing broad brook up to a majestic avenue of plane trees, between which lies the great central approach. To deal first with the forest trees, it will be simple, unadorned truth to say that it would be hard to find finer specimens of planes and chestnuts in any land, and that here they rather perplex and bewilder by their number. One longed to go up for five minutes in a balloon to look at the avenues from above, taking a bird's-eye view. So far as could be ascertained from below, there are four or five starting from various points in the pleasure grounds and running round about the green meadows. At the side of the château is a large enclosed square, formed by steward's, bailiff's, coachman's houses, stables, cowsheds, barns, &c., all in perfect repair, and disposed so as to form a compact and convenient homestead.

In front of the château lie the far-famed pleasure gardens. The eye feasts itself upon a mass of greenery, the greenery of all lands—

of the North and of the South of England, France, and Egypt. There are splendid holly trees, covered with red berries; there are what we used to call snow-berries in England, and there are hedges of quickset and privet. Oleanders assume the dimensions of forest trees, magnolias vie with them in height, while surpassing them in beauty of form and freshness of leaf colouring. Orange trees, laden with fruit, are hemmed in by beeches, limes, elms, and every other description of forest trees. The gardener had planted one large bed with the old-fashioned cockscombs of all colours, which had grown and spread and compacted themselves into a mass of verdure with bold bright flowers standing erect and bidding defiance. About the borders beneath the shrubs were lilies, violets, jonquils, narcissi, the whole compacted by single and double geraniums, which here grow like weeds. All about this garden the water was trickling in rivulets; indeed, it struck one as too damp to be quite healthy at all seasons of the year; but one thing or the other, water or a desert, is the rule of sunny lands.

Seeing a man at work in the kitchen garden, I went up to him for a chat. He proved to be not only the head gardener but the only gardener of this beautiful place. Nothing is stranger than the fact that, whereas generally you must employ half a dozen or a dozen men if you want to keep a garden in first-rate order, and even then you rarely succeed, yet sometimes a single man is to be found who does more than six ordinary men, and, moreover, does it better. How the family secured the man, or how the man did the work, I know not. It was not only that he cultivated the pleasure gardens I have described, but also a large kitchen garden; and he especially prided himself upon his greenhouse, which was being enlarged, and wherein he raised all the young plants destined to fill the flower beds. In addition to what I saw, he informed me that it was "de rigueur" in the establishment that every Monday morning he should place twelve large pots of blooming flowers or shrubs in his lady's flower-stand in the salon. I begged him to keep me in memory, and if at any time he should have a son, or cousin, or see walking through the paths of the wide world another fellow like himself to stop him, catch him, hold him, and send him on to me.

It would be rank treason to a family, which deals so generously with the public in opening its grounds to their view, to speak of them, their manner of life or personal affairs—therefore, of course I forbear; but the history of their château is public property and concerns them not at all.

It would appear that the château has changed hands two or three times within the last century, and of one of the late owners a sad, and, alas, an "o'er true tale" is told. To her it had descended from a long line of warlike and titled ancestors, in reward of whose services to their king and country, acre had been added to acre until the estate had become a little principality.

Madame la Marquise de Z—— was the last of her race; she had given her only two sons to their country's cause, and they had both fallen in the ——— wars. Neither had married, and when, a few years later, the father quietly passed away from mere decay, she saw herself, old, it is true, but still with plenty of vigour and energy, the sole representative of the old name and the possessor of vast wealth. She had never been what is called "dévote," and felt no temptation to build a hospital or endow a church, or do any of the good deeds which many of her friends recommended as being the best consolations for her sorrows; but as she could no longer endure her solitary home, she went to Paris, and took possession of the old family hotel, which, in the time of Louis XIV., had been famous, even in that luxurious age, for its magnificence.

Poor old lady! It was very dull work sitting, as she did for the first year of her widowhood, in those huge, dull rooms, amidst the faded splendours of other days, and recalling the happy times of her newly-married life and young motherhood. However, her unbounded wealth was known, and on that account, and also that she had plenty of "esprit," when her time of mourning was over, her salons were always crowded. She was too old to care for amusement in the common sense of the word, and had no ambition to mingle in politics, and so, "pour se distraire," she began to play. It was one of the most fashionable vices of the time, and enormous stakes were every day lost and won, and our poor old lady was no exception to the rule. At first, her enormous income sufficed to cover her debts of honour as well as the lavish expenditure attending a house carried on as hers was; but she was notoriously unlucky, and soon the faithful old intendant down in Provence received orders to sell, first this, then the other, rich farm, until at last the grand crash came.

After a run of persistent ill luck, the unhappy old woman dreamed, or thought she dreamed, three nights running that she had placed a large sum of money on one particular number and got back all she had lost. It was quite enough for her, the demon of play possessed her; and when the night arrived she had bidden all her guests come and see her good fortune. They came, the place was crowded: all that Paris contained of beauty, wit, and fashion met in those rooms that night—not, perhaps, all so intent upon the forthcoming trial as their hostess supposed, for the troubles of the Revolution were beginning to surge round the throne, and men's minds were anxiously examining events in the political horizon.

But to return to the poor Marquise. She was so thoroughly confident of the forthcoming success, that she was quite calm, and as she sat down to make the grand cast, laughed and chatted with one of her neighbours. "You know, my dear, it would never do for me to lose this time, because when last I played, I was so unfortunate as to stake this hotel, and all its contents. However, Monsieur de L., who has

become its possessor, was kind enough to waive his claim for a week to give me to-day, my revenge. It is absolutely impossible that I should lose, as you will soon see."

Alas, poor unhappy woman! when she rose from that table, she had lost not only her Paris hotel but all that remained of her estate in Provence, the home of her childhood, the birthplace of her noble ancestors. She went forth a beggar. Nothing is positively known of her end, but she is supposed to have perished from want in the first terrible days of 1793.

THE LEGEND OF THE POOR SOUL.

By G. B. Stuart.

A poor soul that in durance lay,
Thus wept and sighed by night and day:
"Could I but see my love again,
Then would I gladly suffer pain,
Would groan and agonise in tears,
And purge my sin a thousand years,
Only once more to see his face!"
There passed an Angel by that place,
And heard the sad, repeated cry
Of the poor soul in misery.
Then, with his mighty wings outspread,
He bent above the suffering dead,
And lifting up the weeping soul,
Fled thro' that realm of grief and dole:
Through the dim wastes of empty space,
Where flutt'ring ghosts in vain gave chase—
Till, far beyond all gloom and dearth,
They lighted on the pleasant earth.

'Twas Maytime, and the fields were glad
With many a laughing lass and lad.
Then spoke the Angel, "Where is he,
Thy love, whom thou hast come to see?"
And the soul answered, "Ah, not here,
He has no heart for joy and cheer,
He whom I seek is weeping lone,
I know it, by my burial stone.
My heart, which still keeps troth with his,
Tells me that there my dear one is!"

Alas, beside the burial stone,
The dear one sat, but not alone—
He recked not of the maiden dead.
Upon his breast a golden head,
And two blue eyes his glance beguiled,
And cheeks that blushed and lips that smiled,
And warm, live hands that held him tight—
The poor soul shivered at the sight,
And with faint words she led away—
"Here is no place for me to stay,
Ah, kind, strong Angel let me go,
Back to my torment-life below,
For better far, that fire and tears,
Prolonged for thrice a thousand years,
Than this which I to-day have borne!
Better to taste, than man's false scorn,
The bitterest drop in God's deep cup!"
Once more the Angel caught her up,
And fled from earth—and the poor soul
Hid from her eyes the nearing goal.
But onward as they winged their flight,
The clear soft air grew warm and bright,
And as they swiftly passed along,
There met them burst of sweetest song,
Till once again the Angel stayed,
And to his sad companion said:
"Look up, take heart, unveil thine eyes,
And enter into Paradise!"

"Alas! I have not purged my sin!"
"Still," said the Angel, "enter in!
For in that moment's agony,
When thou didst learn man's treachery,
Thy purgatorial term was o'er,
Thou might'st not, could'st not suffer more,
And, in God's Name, we welcome thee
To inmost Heaven's felicity."

THE CURÉ'S SISTER.

By F. E. M. Notley, Author of "Olive Varcoe."

I.

HER face was pale and thin, the brow too broad for the delicate cheeks, and the eyes too deeply set and too grave and earnest for a girl. She was slight and small, with a restless energy about her that seemed half a madness. She craved work as eagerly as most girls crave idleness. And even this constant toil would not still the fevered spirit in her, for I have seen her, as her busy fingers plied her task, dash her hand across her brow suddenly, as if to fling away some thought that burned and tortured.

She grew to be for me a study—a psychological wonder, which I mused over, and could not comprehend. She was slow to see I watched her—perhaps, because her mind was full of things into which my image could not come. But when one day, looking up suddenly, she caught my eyes fixed upon her face, she flushed crimson, then turned deathly white, and sank down upon a seat, cold and trembling.

"Léonie, my poor child, are you ill?" cried the Curé, starting up and coming to her hurriedly.

She was crimson again now, and her eyes were so frightened and shrinking that I pitied her.

"No, not ill, *mon frère*," she said, softly; "only tired—a little tired."

"You work too much and too late," returned the Curé. "I heard the loom going at midnight. Why all this toil, Léonie? Surely we are not in such great need of linen that you must perforce work all night?"

"Need of linen!" exclaimed Madame, the Curé's mother, "I should hope not, my son. Last summer we bleached fifty yards, which the scissors have not touched as yet."

"Then why does Léonie work so late?" persisted the Curé. "The child is killing herself."

But Léonie did not hear him; with tears starting to her eyes, she had dropped her work, and stolen from the room.

"Tush! tush! she shall not do it again, I tell thee," said Madame. "I will lock up the loom; 'tis true she toils too hard, and never takes her pleasure like another girl."

"Monsieur le Curé," said I, rising to go, "the next time she comes to you to confess, tell her play is as good for the young as work. I see how it is: you are too straitlaced here for this young spirit. The caged bird droops; let it fly at times, and sing among the flowers; better risk the hawk than pine its heart out. Ah, heavens! if all men's pleasures were as harmless as hers, 'twould be a good world.'

I thought I saw a glow steal into the Curé's cheek, as his hand rested in mine, and he answered me, in a soft tone, half sighing :

"Léonie cares so little for the village fêtes, and she will not choose companions as most girls do ; she has no friend here, I sometimes think ——"

But he stopped, dropped my hand suddenly, and took up his book again, turning the leaves somewhat hurriedly.

"I mean," he said, "that I think a little change would do her good. My mother, shall we seek to get a place for Léonie at Bruxelles?"

"A place!" cried Madame, lifting her hands in astonishment. "I never thought to hear such words from thee, my son. Léonie would break her heart away from home. Surely thou dost not begrudge the shelter of thy roof to thy sister?"

The Curé bent his eyes upon the ground—but not before I saw the shadow of a great trouble in them—and his lips shook as he spoke again.

"Do not mistake me, mother ; all I have is yours and my sister's. This is always Léonie's home, only—only she seems so unhappy here."

"Not at all," returned Madame, cheerfully. "Léonie is happy as a bird ; it is only her quiet way that makes her seem sad."

I would not say the good woman nay, but I knew there was no quiet about Léonie now, unless a volcano be a quiet thing, or an earthquake, when the air is still with terror, and every creature draws its breath in the silence of the coming death.

"Ah, monsieur," exclaimed the Curé, "I forgot that I had somewhat to say. You spoke just now of Léonie confessing to me. Do you not know my own household never come to me to confess? My mother and sister go four miles off, to the good Curé of St. Erme. The Church wisely ordains that a man shall not be confessor to his family."

"A good rule," said I, once more shaking his hand ; "I hope the Curé of St. Erme is a wise man. Adieu, Madame. Make Léonie go to-morrow to the fair at Marche—'tis brimming over with follies, which the wise would do well to look at. Ah, we are but bats and moles, when we shut our eyes to the strange fact that folly is oft-times wisdom in disguise."

"True, true," answered the Curé, smiling ; "poor human nature! it must have its cap and bells."

With this we parted, and I struck across the hill, and through the wood, to my own home.

"A kindly man," I said to myself. "A serene, tranquil man ; not one easily stirred by the world, or moved by the passions that shake most human hearts. Not ill-educated, either, for a village priest, and narrow only when you touch too nearly the beliefs and prejudices of his class. His mother loves him—I like a man whom his mother loves—and his sister watches his every look. Yet she seems afraid ——"

But as this thought of her broke upon my brain I heard a sound of weeping in the wood, and setting aside a branch softly, I saw Léonie at a little distance, seated on the ground, with her face hidden in her hands, and such sobs rising from her slender throat that the ear quailed as they fell upon it.

"Léonie! Léonie!" I cried, "what has happened?"

The girl started to her feet in amazed terror, and gazed at me a moment wildly. Then she staggered against a tree, and leaning on it, touching the bark with her brow, she waved her hand at me impatiently.

"Can I have peace nowhere?" she said, fiercely, between her sobs. "Nothing has happened that a stranger can care for; it would be more polite if Monsieur asked no questions."

"The girl is right," I thought. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddleth not with its grief." So I let the branch go, and walked away quickly, answering her not a word.

"Truly, this is indeed the quiet of the volcano when the fire is gathering," I said, sadly.

II.

THERE was a grand château at St. Erme, with a girdle of great trees set round about it, like giants on guard. Upon the lawn there stood a broken fountain; it was the figure of a sea-god pouring water from a huge shell; but the shell was always dry now, save for the moss and weeds that clung about it, and the dead leaves that drifted towards it mournfully, when the autumn winds blew.

I cannot tell you why, but I never went to St. Erme without visiting this broken fountain. The decay and gloom about the place had a sort of weird charm that drew me to it. The old sea-god wore a grim look upon his face, defiant of time, and the dry shell that his green and mossy fingers clutched seemed to my fancy like the empty cup which the world so oft holds to the lips of the weary, the thirsty, and the heart-sick.

I sat by this fountain one summer day, parched and weary, longing for the water that would never fill it again, when a bright-hued lichen growing on the shell, caught my eye. It grew upon the lip or opening, and as I gathered it, plucking at the roots perhaps somewhat roughly, I drew forth with it a letter, which fell down into the dusty basin.

"Ah, Love! thou art very young and very old," I said. And stooping, I picked up the letter to replace in the shell. Then, much startled, I saw it was addressed to Léonie. I felt perplexed and angry, for in France and Belgium a love-affair is seldom honest and true as it should be; there is a covering of secresy and intrigue about it which oft hides deadly things. "Has she come to this fountain to

find the waters of Marah?" I asked myself, as, after replacing the letter, I walked away, musingly.

What was the right and honest thing to do? Was it loyal to know this secret, and not warn the mother of the girl that a wolf was on the track of her one ewe lamb? Then, again, how did I know he was a wolf? The man might be as earnest, as true a man as ever loved woman. Might be! Yes; but true men did not hide letters, they came openly to woo; for there was no shame in an honourable love. So I would tell the mother; and he would be glad, if he were loyal, for this would give him the chance of speaking that a true love longs for, and if he were disloyal, my timely warning would enable her mother and brother to save the girl from his clutch. I came to this decision as I strolled through the park. And now I sat myself down on a bank, overlooking a glassy pool, fringed by rushes and tangled grass, and here opening my portfolio, I began to sketch. Trees, clouds, shadows, grew upon the paper, and half unconsciously to myself, there came to the pool's brink—in the drawing—a haggard figure, with Léonie's face, wan with gaunt despair, and with outstretched arms she wooed the cold death that rippled darkly at her feet.

I grew enamoured of my work, painting with all my skill the anguish of a desperate soul, driven to death for a refuge. I had but to recall Léonie's face, as I came upon her in the wood, to catch an expression of haggard grief, with a touch of horror in it, that my hand half shuddered at, as my pencil seized it, and traced it on the paper.

"It is like her," I said aloud—"very like."

As I spoke, I looked down upon the rush-fringed pool, gathering the black shadows now of a coming storm; and mingled with these on the rippling water, was the image of a stately lady. Amazed, I turned, and saw her. A handsome lady, dressed as only Paris can dress a woman, and bearing in her presence a certain ease and elegance that bespeak high rank.

"Pardon, monsieur," she said, smiling, "I trust I have not disturbed you. But you have been so absorbed in your work, you have neither seen nor heard me. I have been interested in your sketch, seeing in the figure the likeness of a young girl I know—Léonie Valmine."

"Madame knows her!" I exclaimed, startled.

I thought the lady's face paled slightly as she answered—

"I—I have seen her at church here, and have spoken to her at times."

"And madame is interested in her?" I asked.

This time the lady coloured. "Yes, I am interested in her. She is a strange girl, not like a peasant."

"But she is scarcely a peasant," I replied. "I believe her father was a small farmer, and her mother, who still lives, is a good, homely woman. Her brother, too, the Curé, is no ordinary man, and he has educated her far above most girls of her station."

Gathering up my portfolio, and glancing at the lady, I saw her face was deathly white. A few drops of heavy rain were falling on us, and a loud clap of thunder broke over our heads.

"Madame is afraid of the coming storm?" I observed.

"Yes," she answered, hurriedly. "Let us take shelter; will you accompany me to the château?"

"Do I speak to Madame la Comtesse de St. Erme?" I cried, astonished.

I was astonished, because the Countess, who had not long been married to Monsieur de St. Erme, was spoken of as a gay Parisian lady, a widow when he married her, and one not likely to bury herself alive in this old château.

"I am Madame de St. Erme," she said, smiling wistfully. "Will you do me the favour to enter my house, and shelter yourself from the storm?"

Now a storm in the forest of the Ardennes is not much like a storm in England. It pelts, it beats, it roars, it thunders, and the rain comes down in straight torrents, driving you to the earth, while the wind in sudden gusts beats trees to the very ground. So I gladly accepted the lady's hospitality, and hurrying to the château, we reached it before the rain began to descend in earnest. The Countess had wine and fruit placed before me, and then, as she looked over my portfolio, she began again to speak of Léonie Valmine.

"You said her mother was a good, kindly woman," she observed, bending over the drawing, so low that I scarcely saw her face. "And —and fond of her, I suppose?"

There was something bitter in her tone as she said this.

"She is a most affectionate mother," I answered. "And her brother is devoted to her."

"Ah! yes, the Curé! I am glad they made a priest of him."

"True, madame," I observed; "he could not have chosen better in life; he is most fitted for his office."

"Yes, yes, no doubt," she said, carelessly. "But what do you think of Léonie herself? She struck me as being very different from—from other villagers; there is an air of refinement and grace about her—in one word, a *distinction* very rare, and her appearance would not shame any salon."

"Madame, you have described her well," I replied; "but you have left out the powers of her mind. Depend on it, these are great; though perhaps needing requisite culture, they may be too unformed, too vague, for her to comprehend herself their strength."

"Then you think," cried the lady, eagerly, "that under instruction this girl would rapidly acquire accomplishments?"

"And something more, madame. I fear Léonie has the sad gift of genius, with all its mighty power of suffering. She has been an enigma—a study to me these three years."

"Have you known her so long?" asked Madame de St. Erme.

"And you judge that hers is a nature that can suffer deeply? Ah! those coarse people doubtless try an organisation like hers sadly."

"Her relations are not coarse," I said, a little coldly. "And her love for them would refine them, if they were."

The Countess coloured deeply, and laid her hand upon my drawing.

"Have you ever seen in Léonie," she said, and her voice shook a little, "any signs of a sorrow, which led your imagination insensibly to depict her here, on the brink of death and despair?"

I felt embarrassed at the question, and hesitated slightly in my reply.

"Madame, I have said that Léonie is an enigma to me, and whether my imagination—alas! imagination too often is a prophet!—has interpreted her there truly or not, I dare not say. But this I can safely avow, that hers is a strong, determined, yet poetic nature, with *danger* in it, and passion, and depth which God in His mercy has hidden even from the poor girl herself."

Madame de St. Erme rose and came towards me; she was very pale, and her eyes swam in tears.

"I hope you have not judged her truly, sir," she said, clasping her hands. "I trust Léonie is of a calmer, softer nature than you think. You may deem it strange that I question you thus, and that I speak thus of Léonie Valmine; but I have a reason, which you will one day know. And then you will no longer wonder at my anxiety. God help me! it is perhaps my duty to inflict, for her own benefit, a great sorrow and trial on poor Leonie."

Whatever curiosity I might feel, I could ask no questions; so I merely murmured a few words, expressive of my pleasure in being able to give her any information respecting the Curé's sister.

"And I trust my opinion has not impressed you unfavourably," I added, eagerly, "for Léonie is a most industrious girl, a devoted sister and daughter, and I am sure she has a noble heart."

"Thank you," said Madame de St. Erme, laying her hand on my arm. "Nothing you could say would impress me unfavourably with Léonie, but I am pleased with your words of kindness. But this power of grief you have observed in her, how can it be dangerous? What is there of *danger* in it? The young forget so soon."

"Do they?" said I; and a wistful shadow passed over my own face. "The shallow, the unfeeling, and the stupid forget, but genius remembers for ever."

The Countess was silent, but her lips quivered painfully.

"But the grief, the agony I have seen in Leonie," I continued, "may be only the blind outpourings of her passionate, poetic nature. And she works—she works incessantly. The woman or man that *works* will come out of the fire at last, with scarce the smell of burning on him."

"True, true," she answered, eagerly. "And genius delights in its

own development. Oh, I see this strange, rare girl will yet be happy!"

Does she mean to educate her? I said to myself in wonder, being greatly puzzled by her language and her interest in Léonie Valmine. I might have asked her this question, but the door opened, and a young man of about twenty-two entered the room.

"My son, Monsieur de Villet," said Madame, and as he bowed to to me, she, standing behind him, placed her finger on her lip.

I thought of the letter instantly, and, blunderer that I was, I fancied I saw the whole story clear as in a crystal.

"This young man loves Léonie," I said; "and his mother, intending to inflict on the girl the agony of an eternal parting—perhaps to save her from worse sorrow—will console her with the routine of a school, and the drudgery of accomplishments."

Thus thinking, I looked upon Monsieur de Villet with a jaundiced eye. He was handsome, tall, and well-made, but his face was an ordinary face; there was no stamp of power on it, no expression, beyond a little pride, a little carelessness, a little self-conceit. A smooth face, that would take the world easily, never striking itself against the roughnesses and sorrows a harsh face would meet with and surmount. And as for love—whoever loved him would beat their heart against marble—selfish, polished marble, too happy in its insensibility to understand that human nerves can quiver beneath a careless blow.

"Léonie is mad to love such a man," I said, gathering up my portfolio, lest he should look in it. "But then, women always love such men, so why do I wonder at it?"

The young Count talked well, throwing a sort of fascinating grace over his chatter of horses, Paris clubs, and barrack-life. Then, in conversation, I discovered he was not Madame's son, but the only child of her first husband, the Comte de Villet. When the rain cleared, and I went away, he walked with me courteously to the gate, and I ventured to say, "I am sorry Madame has no child of her own; she strikes me as having a great heart."

"Oh, but I am the same to her as her own son," answered the young man, gracefully enough. "And I never remember any other mother. She has been the best of mothers to me."

In his eyes, this was all that was necessary to make her happy; she had fulfilled her duty to him! He lifted his hat, smiling like a gracious prince, and strolled away whistling, with the most careless air in the world playing all about him, even in the swing of his cane.

III.

I WENT to the Curé's house the next day, and studied with *new* eyes —if I may use the expression—the three faces presented to my contemplation. And as I looked on Madame Valmine's homely, unin-

tellectual, household visage, my heart sank. Could I dare give into her rough hands the secret of Léonie's unhappiness? The girl's nature was like some delicate fabric of gossamer, which a touch would destroy; she was one whose very reason might be shaken by injudicious treatment or sudden sorrow; it behoved me, then, to be cautious in what I did.

"Truly, her brother's hand will be the gentlest and the best to guide her," I said. "And his sacred office will help to make her deem his counsel the safest and wisest she can take."

So I decided I would tell the Curé of the letter—and to gain the opportunity, I asked him to take a stroll with me in the wood. Léonie, who was sitting by the window, sewing, looked at me keenly as I spoke; and then I saw the sign of weeping on her face, the dark rims round her eyes, the quiver of the mouth, the flitting shadow on the cheeks. I felt half guilty as I met her glance, and yet it was my duty to warn her brother. Was that young popinjay, the Count, to mar the peace of this quiet family, and I not raise one of my fingers to save them? At this moment, as if purposely to strengthen my resolve, the Count came sauntering up the village street, riding on a showy horse, with all his dogs about him, and that nameless air of health and wealth and luxury shining round him which seems the very atmosphere of cultivated idleness.

He rode on slowly, not languidly at ease like an Englishman, but vainly, joyously conscious of the many gazers that his good looks drew to doors and windows. But I watched Léonie. At the first glimpse she caught of his sleek, shining steed, cheek and neck and hands flushed crimson; then the tide rushed back to her heart, and her face grew like a face in a shroud. But even as the grey whiteness overspread it, she started up, and ran into an inner room. Did she rush away to hide herself from the Count's gaze, or was it for fear her looks would betray the truth to others? But he knew the house—he surely expected her at the window; for as he passed he bent his head, and, with a curious look of scrutiny, scanned the place, half-smiling, half-contemptuous.

Yes, my lord Count, a very poor place, with windows sadly out of drawing, a door a world too narrow, and a little garden which would scarce hold your family dust. Will it please you to pass on?

No, it did not please him; for, catching sight at this minute of my sour visage, he bowed to it, and hesitated an instant, as if to speak. But seeing me stand still, he raised his military cap, and sauntered on as though he had just won some great victory, and was out airing himself in the world's eye, that it might see his triumph.

"Come to the wood, my good friend," I cried to the Curé; "a house wearies me to-day."

"Ah, you know the young Count?" exclaimed Madame Valmine.

"Only since yesterday," I said, "when his mother introduced him to me."

Glancing sideways at the door, I saw Léonie standing there, listening breathlessly.

"His mother!" cried Madame. "Have you seen our dear lady? Ah, I hope she is happy now."

"Has she ever been unhappy?" I asked.

"Yes. When she was young, she loved our Count, and they were going to marry; but his mother—the proudest lady that ever stepped—broke off the match. She suffered terribly, I have heard, and her beauty went like a shadow; but after a year or two, she married the Count de Villet, and he took her off to Paris. And there she stayed till he died, and then she came back to her own country——"

"Then is she of this neighbourhood?" I said, interrupting her eagerly.

"Not quite: her own château is about twenty miles from this, and she spent her year of widowhood there; then returned to Paris. But our Count, who had never married, came home from foreign lands about that time, and they were wedded a few months ago. Ah, I hope they will have a child; it will be sad for the Countess to be childless in both her marriages."

Léonie was standing against the side-post of the door, and as her mother talked, she clutched it tremblingly, and there came upon her face a look of anguish that I long remembered.

"But the Countess has a gallant son in that young man," said the Curé, as he took his hat down from its peg.

"The young Count de Villet?" returned his mother. "He is no son to her. I mind him when his father came to the Ardennes, a suitor to Mademoiselle. A headstrong boy he was then—mischievous as an imp. You remember him, my son?"

The Curé nodded assent. "But a good-looking boy," he said, kindly. "My father's house and farm," he continued, turning to me, "were close by the lands and château of Madame de St. Erme's father; so you see, my mother remembers her when a girl, and knows all about her first engagement being broken, and after this her marriage to Monsieur de Villet."

"And a mighty fuss there was," said Madame Valmine. "You know, a marriage broken off ruins a girl's prospects of happiness. That's how Mademoiselle came to marry a Frenchman, and a man old enough to be her father, and a widower besides."

"But, doubtless, her first husband's child is a good son to her, and compensates her for being childless herself. What do you say, Mademoiselle Léonie?"

I asked her this, anxious to see how she would bear a question addressed to her respecting the young Count, but I scarcely expected her agitation would be so terrible.

"I cannot say anything," she cried out, in a sharp voice. "How should I know what mothers feel? I dare not probe a mother's heart. I can tell you what a child feels—a child who is obliged to

desert mother, brother, home, and all it loves—I can tell you *that.*" And holding out both her hands towards us quiveringly, she set her teeth upon her lips, and so held in the cry that shook upon them.

"Léonie! Léonie!" exclaimed the Curé, "what ails thee lately? Is there some trouble on thy mind, my child?"

He put his arm about her as he spoke, and for a moment she yielded to that kind embrace; then she dashed his hand aside, with cruel passion, and her whole face flamed as with sudden shame and anger.

"Do not ask me—do not caress me, Gabriel," she said, gathering her arms across her bosom with a shudder. "It is nothing I can tell to thee; I will speak to my confessor. 'Tis a point of conscience, mother"—and she looked at Madame Valmine pleadingly—"so thou could'st not quiet my soul if I told thee all."

The Curé sighed heavily. "May the *bon Dieu* give the good Curé of St. Erme wisdom to set thy soul at peace, my sister," he said, as, bowing his head to his mother, he and I passed out at the door.

IV.

Among the peacefullest shadows of the wood, where the quiet wrapped us about like a cloud from heaven, I told him of the broken fountain, and the letter I had found in the lichen-lipped shell.

"It was certainly from the Count," I said; "the man is making love to her from idleness."

"But he and his mother have only been at St. Erme a month," returned the simple Curé.

"A month is long enough for a man like him to win a girl's ear and heart. There, I have told you what I thought it was my duty to tell. I leave the rest to you."

The poor Curé was very pale, and he put his hand helplessly to his brow.

"I know so little of the world," he said; "aid me with your counsel. What shall I do to save her? If she loves this young man, she will perish of sorrow."

"You can choose what you will do," I answered, "whether you will speak to the Count, or to his mother, or to Léonie herself."

"I have never yet spoken to my sister of her lovers," he said, his cheek flushing a little; "and there has been no need; hitherto she has repulsed all admirers. Ah! I always feared she would love a gentleman."

"I am not surprised at that," I said; "her ways are not the ways of the peasants around her."

"So you have remarked her air and manner?" continued the Curé, sorrowfully. "Doubtless, in that lies the root of the unhappiness which I have seen in her, since she has grown old enough to think. She does not feel at home here; there is a craving in her nature for

the refinements that the instincts of her blood tell her should be hers. I am certain she is of noble birth."

I looked at him in an astonishment that held me silent.

"Do you not know that Léonie is a foundling?" he asked.

"A foundling!" I repeated.

"Yes, a child from the Foundling Hospital. I had a baby sister who died, and my mother, grieved for the infant's loss, went to the hospital and asked for a child to nurse. They gave her the little Léonie, and she has loved her ever since as her own child. At twelve years of age, the foundlings are given up to the hospital by their foster-family and are then generally placed out as servants, or apprenticed to some trade. But there are exceptions to this rule. At that age, the hospital pays no longer towards their support, but it permits the foster-mother to retain the foundling, if she and the child both wish it; and, unless very poor, they often desire it, for the affection between them is very great, and few families are pleased to part with a child, who for twelve years has been one of themselves. My mother and I both agreed we would never let Léonie leave us. That is how she came to be my sister, monsieur."

I grew agitated as I listened. This little history, like a key, unlocked for me so many of Léonie's sad feelings.

"Everyone in the village knows Léonie is a foundling," continued the Curé; "but as she has been with us ever since she was an infant the fact of her not being really my mother's daughter is seldom spoken of; indeed, it is almost forgotten. And as for poor Léonie herself, we are everything to her; and she, of course, has never known any other home than ours."

"And yet you fancy she is unhappy or discontented?" I said.

"She has been gloomy this three years past," he answered, sadly. "And now, if she loves this young Count, I fear she will be wretched indeed."

"Is there any hope of his marrying her?" I inquired.

"Marry a foundling!" cried the Curé. "There is no fear of a Count de Villet doing that."

"And I think the Countess de St. Erme intends to hinder even a chance of such an alliance," I said. And then I related to him her strange conversation with me.

"Léonie will never accept money or gifts for renouncing her son's love," he cried; "but she is so eager to learn, that the offer of instruction may tempt her. I will speak to her, my friend. I will warn her against the love of this frivolous young man. I will see his mother also; perhaps she will take him back to Paris."

Here our conversation ended, and I went home wondering I had never guessed before why Léonie was unlike her family, and why her grace and delicacy had impressed me as something strangely anomalous with her position. And what are her thoughts? Does she ever dream of the mother that forsook her, the father who was a curse to

her from the beginning? Does she really feel the stirrings of ancient and proud blood within her? Is she ambitious, restless, weary? Perhaps, dimly feeling some pride of race in her own veins, she deceives herself in the thought, that this young Count will recognize the signet of nobility upon her, and will marry her, and restore her to the place from which her parents flung her.

Poor Léonie! it is no marvel there is a seal upon thy face, which my undiscerning eyes failed to deciper. It must be a strange, an awful feeling, not to know one's parentage—to put forth one's hand blindly in this great universe, never hoping to clasp a relation—to know one stands utterly alone, the world a blank around us, no name, no part, no inheritance written in it anywhere for the foundling. Even his share in the past is taken from him, and sealed up in darkness and mystery. For him there is no ancestry, no links going down into honoured graves, and reaching thence to heaven; no holy family memories, no thought of father, mother, brother, and sister; nothing but this great loneliness, this wistful craving of the soul, this cry of the heart for natural ties.

Ah, me! And is it the shadow of all this I have seen on Léonie's face? And does there rest upon her proud spirit a darkness, which is half a curse and half a contemptuous pardon, for the parents whose selfish sin and silence have wrought in her soul this evil?

I was sitting alone that evening, thinking of this poor girl, with a pity ever growing fresher and deeper, when the Curé entered abruptly. He was in great distress.

"Léonie confesses having seen the Count, but she denies having received letters from him," he said. "And she will not promise not to speak to him again. Ah! my friend, I can see her heart is breaking, and I am in despair."

"But she will not permit this selfish man to blind her to her duty," I said, soothingly. "Take courage, Léonie will not inflict sorrow on her mother and brother."

I spoke more hopefully than I felt, for I thought the girl's character, and the melancholy circumstances of her birth, impelling her towards romance and mystery, would greatly tend to strengthen a misplaced and ambitious love.

"Duty!" said the Curé, sorrowfully. "It is to that very word that Léonie clings. It is her duty, she says, to see the Count. And my entreaties, my prayers, my affection, only drive her into a kind of madness. She fell on her knees at last and besought me so passionately to cease to torture her, that in very pity I came away."

On hearing this, I could only wonder how love could so blind an honest conscience; and I looked on the simple, kindly face of the young Curé, deeply commiserating his grief.

"At all events," said I, wishing to comfort him, "if Léonie forsakes her home, she cannot disgrace you and Madame Valmine, since she is in reality no daughter to her, no sister to you."

"No sister to me!" exclaimed the Curé; "Heaven forbid such a thought should enter my soul!"

His earnest face, always somewhat wan, grew pale and haggard as he spoke, and he rose to leave somewhat hurriedly.

"I am sorry if I have pained you," I said, grasping his hand.

"Foreigners can scarcely understand," he answered, "how completely a foundling becomes one of the family who adopt it. My mother and I never remember that Léonie is not of our blood."

His eyes met mine in saying this, and there was a something in them that startled me. Then, too, for the first time it struck me, what a young and handsome man he was, and his goodness, his piety, his simplicity seemed grander and more worthy of respect, being shown as they were by one, for whom life—were he any other but a priest—would be filled with the illusions and temptation of youth.

When he left me, his image remained on my mind, with a curious sensation of pain around it, and I began telling myself that we were all wondrous blind to the silent battles, the untold martyrdoms, the fiery victories going on around us in the hearts of our neighbours.

V.

I CAME home from fishing late, and placed my well-filled basket on the table with some triumph, but my disdainful housekeeper scarcely glanced at it.

"Here is a letter, sir, for you," she said, "and a man-servant from the château has been waiting for an answer all the afternoon."

So her curiosity about the letter swallowed up her interest in my fishing; and to show myself superior to so vulgar a feeling, I took the epistle with an air of supreme indifference.

It was from Madame de St. Erme, asking me courteously to dine with her one day in the ensuing week.

"Shall I accept this invitation, when I truly think the young Count a sorry scoundrel?" I said to myself. But in spite of this mental expostulation, I did what the rest of the world would have done. I wrote and said, I should be delighted to have the pleasure, &c—the truth is, I would not on any account have deprived Madame Rodière of the pride she would feel in telling all the village I was going to dine at the Château of St. Erme.

"Ah, here is another letter," she said, "but I would not give it until this important one was despatched. It is only from the Curé's sister, wanting another English book, no doubt."

I tore open the note, and read thus:

"I entreat you, Monsieur, to meet me this evening at the fountain in the park at St. Erme. I will be there at seven. I go to the Curé of St. Erme to-day to confess.—LEONIE."

It was past six now, so after a scanty meal I hurried away on

horseback; and tying my horse to the park-gate I sauntered towards the fountain.

It stood in a lonely and neglected part of the grounds, and as I drew near it, I saw Léonie standing there with the Count by her side. He stood hat in hand, bending towards her, in an attitude of mock deference I thought. And once he stooped and would have touched her hand, but she drew back, shrinking against the fountain, and then he bowed to her with a vexed air and strode away.

I did not intercept him, for he went towards the house, and I reached Léonie just as his figure disappeared between the trees. She was not watching him, her eyes were bent towards the ground, and when she lifted them at my approach there was neither the joy nor fear of love in them.

"Léonie, I am here; why do you wish to see me?" I said, kindly.

"Oh, Monsieur!" she cried, clasping her hands, "comfort them when I am gone—console them when they see my face no more!"

"Léonie, are you mad? What are you going to do?" I exclaimed.

"I am going to leave them for ever," she answered. "I am asked to desert my home, my mother, and—and Gabriel, and I have almost consented to do this ——"

"Then you do a wicked and ungrateful thing," I cried, "and one that will plunge you into sin and death. Pause, child, before you forsake your duty thus."

"My duty!" and her bent head fell upon her hands; "It is my duty—my terrible duty to do this—there is no hope for me—no escape. I must do this, or go into perdition, body and soul."

Her agony shook her whole frame, and I dared not speak for a moment till she was calmer.

"Léonie, you are mistaken; it cannot be your duty to destroy yourself, to fling yourself into eternal shame and misery for a sinful love."

My words seemed to pierce her very heart, for after one quick look of dismay and anguish, she hid her face from my sight. I think she prayed, for starting suddenly to her feet, she pointed upwards.

"God, who has opened this way for me to escape, will not permit me to do that," she said. "Do not plead with me for my own soul," she added, wildly. "Speak of his: tell me that I have no right to drag him into the ways of perdition. Oh, sir, the sin of my heart is killing me?"

The sudden way in which she flung her outstretched hands towards me, the wild agony in her eyes, showed me how terrible in its strength was her passion for this man.

"Léonie," I said, softly, "calm yourself. The sinner who *owns* his sin is half saved already. Cease to meet the object of your love; flee from the man who agitates your heart thus, and earn his gratitude, his blessing for the sacrifice you make. You are right to think of his

peace, as well as of your own; why should yours be the hand to draw him into the broad road that leadeth to destruction?"

She listened to me, weeping.

"Leave him then," I continued, "leave him for ever; even without a farewell, if you have not strength to say it. Do not hesitate; the gulf which stands only a few steps from you is horrible in its depth."

"Go on!—go on!" she said, flinging her hands towards me again for a moment, and then covering her face as before.

"You told me to plead with you for his sake, Léonie, not your own; so for his sake, I say, never touch his hand again, never see his face again, but part with him now and for EVER!"

Ah! may I never hear again from human lips such a cry as broke from hers, as she fell forward on her knees and seized my hand.

"You have saved me," she said. "I have strength now to obey you. Come with me at once."

She dragged herself on her knees towards me, and grasped my wrist as the drowning clutch a hand.

"Come! come! if I linger a moment I shall lose my strength. Now!—let me save him now! If you unclasp my hand, I am lost."

I raised her, and to my amazement she directed her swift steps towards the château. I still grasped her hand tightly, and her excitement was so great that her speed and strength seemed supernatural. I would not check her in her design. "She goes," I thought, "to tell the Countess she renounces her son, and accepts the propositions that have been made to her."

I spoke to her but once during that hurried, fevered walk. It was when we were at the great doors of the house of St. Erme.

"Léonie, you have done well. God will bless you for it. You could never be his wife, you know."

She turned a white face on me, with the shadow of a great horror falling over it like a veil; her lips moved, but I heard no sound save the word "Wife! Wife!" like someone repeating a wild echo in madness. I had no time to soothe her, for a servant opened the door, and in a moment we were in the presence of Madame de St. Erme.

She was paler than when I saw her last, and she sat listlessly on her velvet couch, as though life was a weariness to her. But as her eyes fell on us, a sudden change came over her face, and she said "Léonie!" in a surprised, anxious tone.

Then Léonie went towards her, trembling as she went, and holding out her hands, as the blind do, gropingly.

"I am come," she said—she faltered, she raised her heavy eyes tear-laden to heaven, as if for strength. "I am come," she said again. "I have forsaken them for ever. Mother, I am yours—take me!"

The words were a cry of anguish, and her hands, as she flung them forward, quivered. But Madame de St. Erme sprang towards her, and caught her in her arms as she fell.

"She is my daughter," she said, turning her streaming eyes towards me. "Léon! Léon!"

Her piercing cry brought from an inner room, a tall, careworn man, with white hair, and singular grey eyes. This was Monsieur de St. Erme. There was no need to tell me he was Léonie's father. I saw on his face, as on hers, the marks—the *scars* rather—that betray a passionate nature; and the likeness between them was vivid.

"Oh Léon, she has come to me of her own accord! she will love me now."

I pitied Madame de St. Erme. There was a world of tenderness, of sorrow, and of trembling, half-fearful joy in these few words; and her quivering voice lost itself in sobs and kisses as she fell on her daughter's neck. As for Léonie, she lay pale, cold, and speechless in her mother's arms, opening her eyes only when her father stooped and pressed his lips on her forehead. At this she struggled to rise and kneel before him, her cold hands, unresponsive to his caress, being crossed on her bosom. But the Count raised her hurriedly.

"My poor injured child," he said, and his voice broke. "May Heaven forgive thy mother and myself all our wrongs towards thee. All we have is thine, and all we ask in return, Léonie, is a little love—only a little, my child."

"Kiss thy father, Léonie," said Madame de St. Erme, in a tone tear-broken and pleading.

The girl obeyed her; but her lips shook, and I saw no light of love on her pale, cold cheek or in her deep, sad eyes.

"Lionel," said the trembling Countess, "I will take our daughter to my room, till this cruel agitation is calmed. She shall lie down and sleep in my bed, and I will watch by her."

I wish I could convey in words the ineffable tenderness, the *mother's* soul and heart, the pride, pain, and pity, that spoke in Madame de St. Erme's accents as she uttered this.

Then she turned to her husband. "And, meanwhile, Léon, you must explain to Monsieur the meaning of all this. You have assisted, sir, at a painful, yet joyous, family scene. If your persuasions brought Léonie to us, you shall have my life-long gratitude."

"Yes, he persuaded me," said Léonie, dreamily. Then, like one awaking from some terrible sleep, she broke forth in heart-rending accents: "Comfort them! console them for me! answer to them yourself for my loss. It was your doing—I have listened to you. I hold you responsible for their peace." There was such a mist before my eyes, that, save for the pressure of the Countess's hand on mine in passing, I should not have known she and Léonie had quitted the room, till the sudden silence told me I was left alone with Monsieur de St. Erme to listen to his story.

(To be concluded.)

HER ONE CHANCE: AND HIS.

"THERE she is," said Dot, as a tall, slight figure with a trailing black dress and a scarlet shawl came around the corner by the lime trees, and walked slowly towards them. "That's Miss Maverick—and, oh, Reginald! she's lovely."

"Is she?" said Reginald, a little dubiously, "I shouldn't"—but the near approach of the stranger kept back the remainder of his sentence, and with his lowest bow he expressed himself "delighted" at meeting Miss Maverick, when Dora introduced him.

"My cousin, Mr. Lanster, Katherine."

Miss Maverick bowed in answer, took a calmly critical survey of the young gentleman, and after saying a few words to him and his companion, walked towards the house.

"So that is Reginald Lanster," she said to herself. "Dot's fate!—lucky little goose!"

"You think she is 'lovely,' do you?" debated Reginald, when the tall figure had passed by. "Not very good taste on your part, I think, Miss Dora:" but, oddly enough, he turned his handsome head and looked after her for all that.

"What did you say she was, Dot?—a music mistress?"

"Yes," answered Dot; "our music teacher at school. When papa was calling the other day to see me, she was in the room giving me my lesson. He heard her name and spoke to her, and it came out that he and her father were great friends in early life, and he invited her to come home with me for these holidays. Mr. Maverick was a Colonial merchant, or something of that, and affairs got bad with him and he died."

"And so the daughter has to teach music!"

"Yes; such a pity! Such toil it is! And she is so nice!" ran on Dot. "I am sorry you do not like her!"

"I did not say I disliked her," contended Reginald, who liked to have everything his own way, conversation included. "How can I like her or dislike her, Dot, when I never before set eyes upon her? She is a grand young woman; I concede that; and perhaps will improve on acquaintance."

"There! Improve!"

Reginald laughed: he was fond of teasing little Dot. She would be eighteen this month, and had come home for good; he was twenty-one. Both of them were wealthy: and according to family plans and projects, in two years more they were to become man and wife.

"Never mind," said Reginald, loftily. "I say she may improve on acquaintance; meanwhile, let us talk of something else." But still

when a turn in the path brought the graceful figure, with its scarlet and black draperies into view again, he turned his head and looked after her once more. "She walks well," said he, "like a Spaniard, and they are the most graceful race of women I know."

"How was it you only got here this morning, Reginald?—and are you come to make a long stay?"

"That's as may be," answered Reginald, passing the first query over. "Depends, perhaps, upon how you treat me."

"Oh!" exclaimed Dora. "Why, we always treat you well. Papa and mamma are always glad to see you."

"What a dear, simple child it is!" thought the young man, superior in his three years' elder wisdom.

He made better acquaintance with Miss Maverick in the evening. Her dark, oval face looked well by gaslight; her eyes were large and lustrous; her heavy black hair, braided in a coronet and destitute of ribbon or ornament of any kind, was a wonder in itself; and although her dress was so plain that, on another woman, it might have seemed almost "dowdy"—her tall, graceful figure made it seem a garb fit for a princess.

Her manner pleased Reginald. She was ladylike, quiet and dignified; brilliant, too, he found in conversation when he heard her talking with his uncle. Mr. Lanster, a pleasant, well-informed man, seemed much struck with her.

"A fine woman," commented Reginald to himself. "I rather admire her." But the "fine woman," apparently ignorant of his kindly feelings, was unapproachable and distant all the evening.

The next day it was the same, and the next, and so on, until at last, Reginald Lanster—handsome, petted, conceited fellow that he was, became fairly piqued by the singularly chilly manner of the "poor teacher," towards whom he would have been unusually suave and amiable.

Katherine Maverick, never thinking to offend or slight him, looked upon him as a boy. Little more than a boy was he yet—only twenty-one; a handsome, idle, good-natured, good-for-nothing boy. He had left college before his time, had come into his property, and felt very much disposed to have a "regular good time" of it. He was vain; he had been made much of all his life; and he had been falling in and out of love continuously since the remote period when he had first donned a pair of boots.

He had been deeply in love with no less than three young ladies since coming down from college; but when he started on this visit to his uncle's he made his mind up to devote himself to Dot only during his stay. But he found Dot rather much of a baby, or a schoolgirl, yet. And several days went on.

"Dot is a darling," he said, meditatively, as he strolled down to the beach alone one afternoon; Dot having been borne off to make some stately "calls," in which Regy flatly refused to participate.

"Such a dear, little, kittenish thing, so different from that Miss Maverick. Still she's hardly—Halloa!" for a sudden turn, around a jutting rock, caused him almost to fall over a dark-robed lady, who sat there gazing out to sea.

"I am sure I beg your pardon," he said, lifting his hat. "I didn't know you were here."

The soft dark eyes were turned slowly upon him. "Ah, it is you," she said, with a smile, which made Regy wonder how he had ever thought her plain. "I often come here—I like to watch the sea."

The slender hand drew her dress away slightly from the other end of the rock on which she sat, and Reginald, emboldened by the smile, gallantly asked permission to seat himself beside her.

It was astonishing how quickly they became acquainted. Miss Maverick, on the sands alone, and all to himself, was very different from Miss Maverick in company: and Reginald soon found himself talking and laughing with her freely, as though they were quite old friends.

Not until the slanting beams of the sun warned them of the flight of time, did they think of returning homeward; and, then, as Miss Maverick, drawing her shawl around her, rose to go, he said with a boyish directness, which once in a while came to the surface through all his affectations: "I like you a great deal better than I thought I did. I hope I shall have a chance to talk with you again."

"Thanks for the wish," she answered, laughing softly, and then they separated, she going slowly towards the house, and he waiting behind on the beach to indulge in a cigar: and, for a wonder, thinking.

"By Jove, she's a splendid girl! That little stupid Dot's nothing beside her. I must cultivate my friendship with Miss Maverick. What a shame that she should be a teacher in Dot's school. She's a true lady, if ever there was one."

After that, they met often; by accident, as it seemed to Katherine. Sometimes on the beach, or in the shady garden, or in one or other of the quiet rooms of the pretty little house—for this was only Mr. Lanster's seaside residence.

"Regy seems to be very studious all on a sudden," observed Mr. Lanster one day. "He doesn't care to go out with us at all; he is always strolling out in solitude with a book."

Alas for Regy's "solitary studies!" The book which accompanied him was generally used as a hassock for Miss Maverick's trimly-booted feet, and Regy himself was studying quite another volume. Mrs. Lanster did not often invite the teacher to accompany herself and daughter on these visits; the little open carriage held but two besides the coachman; and Regy was sure to find her on the beach or among the rocks. Then perhaps they had a little study together, that of some seductive book of poetry.

This was all very nice and pleasant; still it was dangerous. Regy knew it; perhaps Miss Maverick knew it. Regy knew perfectly well

that if the real state of affairs was discovered he would be sent home to his mother in disgrace, and that there would be, as he expressed it, "a devil of a row all round," and Miss Maverick suspected that her stay with Mrs. Lanster might be of extremely short duration, should the full extent of her intimacy with the young heir become known.

Both knew this, and yet, perhaps this knowledge was partly that which made the situation so pleasant—a spice of danger is always fascinating; and so, as the days passed, Regy found himself doing precisely the thing which he ought not to have done, falling tremendously in love with this fine girl, fathoms deeper than he had ever gone before.

And Katherine Maverick? She laughed at him, petted him, scolded him, and called him a "foolish boy," unconscious that she daily made the net stronger and stronger. She was not a scheming woman, nor a hard-hearted woman, but she was poor, and sick to death of her hard life, and perhaps this rendered her less scrupulous than she would have been. Besides, why did they think her not good enough to pay visits with them?—that stung her; why did they leave her alone to Regy's society? If Reginald Lanster some fine day asked her to marry him—ah! what a prospect it would be! Should she say Yes? It seemed to be her one chance of lifting herself out of her undesirable life. One consideration would be a drawback to it, and that was Dot.

The child was so honestly fond of her, she confided all the secrets of her innocent heart to her, and the chiefest of these was about her cousin Regy. Katherine felt a little conscience-stricken as the girl talked to her on this subject. "I love him so dearly," Dot said one day; "I wouldn't tell anyone else in the world but you, you seem like a sister now, and I know you can be trusted." And thus, with her curly head on her friend's shoulder, she would talk of Regy and herself and of the "some day" which was coming in the future.

One Saturday afternoon, when Mr. Lanster returned from town, he brought with him a friend, Mr. Sarmiento. Dora observed that she supposed it must be a Greek name, as Mr. Sarmiento was a Greek merchant; very rich and powerful. He lived in a beautiful house near town, and had one little girl, but no wife, for she was dead. A tall, fine man of some six-and-thirty years, sensible, well-informed, with a pleasant voice and manner.

He sat next to Katherine at dinner and seemed greatly pleased with her; and was with her afterwards during a good part of the evening.

"That's a very nice young woman you have staying with you, Lanster," he remarked to his host, when they went out together, with their cigars, for a short stroll the last thing.

"Ay; so I think," warmly replied Mr. Lanster. "You remember Maverick, who was in the Colonial trade seven or eight years ago?"

"And made that fiasco in it before he died? Yes."

"Not his fault, though. John Maverick was honest as the day."

"His misfortune, then. I dare say it was so. Well, what of him?"

"This is his daughter."

"No!" exclaimed Mr. Sarmiento, in surprise. "*His* daughter—and teaching in a school!"

"What would you?" quietly returned the host: "Maverick's means died with him—and his wife died of grief soon afterwards. The poor girl had nothing left to live upon; so she remained in the school, where she was being educated, as music-mistress, and I fancy—as general drudge."

"Poor girl, indeed! She seems to me to deserve a happier fate," concluded Mr. Sarmiento.

It was Thursday, the sixth day of Mr. Sarmiento's stay. Other visitors also had been coming and going. Most of the leisure time of that gentleman seemed to be devoted to Miss Maverick: when he was not obliged by courtesy to devote it to others. He certainly enjoyed talking with her, their conversation often turning on her late father and the years gone by. If she went on the beach, he would join her there; if she sat in the shady nooks of the garden, he would be sure to find her. At night she sang the songs he liked and asked for: and she sang very sweetly. Reginald Lanster felt that he should like to drown Mr. Sarmiento.

Reginald had fallen desperately in love with Katherine. He had been in love several times before, but was never, he thought, as much in earnest as now. He wandered about in a torment of mind inconceivable: partly caused by jealousy, partly by indecision—for he could not quite decide whether to brave his mother and all the Lanster family, and offer Katherine his hand; or whether to let his love die away by-and-bye, as it had died for all his former flames.

On this day, Thursday, watching Katherine, his aunt, and one or two more ladies, attended by Mr. Sarmiento, start off to walk to some ruins in the neighbourhood, the young man felt especially bitter. "Why don't you come also, Reginald?" called out Mr. Sarmiento, as he ran past him at the door to catch up the ladies; not, however, waiting for any answer.

"Hang him!" muttered Reginald, considering himself unreasonably ill-used. It was not *altogether* about Katherine, his grievance; it was on the score of neglect as well. Formerly he was all-in-all in the household; now nothing was cared for but this old Sarmiento.

In a frightful temper, he went off to the beach. Dora followed, slipping her hand, cousinly fashion, within his arm: all unconscious, poor child, that he no longer saw in her "the sweetest little girl in the world," but an emissary of unkind fortune, whom he could not help showing temper to.

It *was* hard upon her; altogether hard. Regy put it more strongly

and called it, in self-reproach, "devilish mean." But there seemed to be no help for it; and would not be until that wretch was gone.

"How long does that fellow mean to stay, Dot?" he cried.

"What fellow?" asked Dot.

"That Sarmiento."

"Till Tuesday next, I think. I fancy he and papa are going up together. Don't you like him, Regy? We all do."

"I should like to shoot him!" ferociously avowed Reginald.

"Oh, how can you! Why, he is very nice-looking. His hair is as bright as gold."

"Hang his hair!" growled the young man, as he shook off Dot's gentle hand and strode away from her.

Poor Dot, not understanding matters in the smallest degree, sat down on the sands and cried a little. What was it that she did, that she had been doing for days past, to offend Reginald, and make him so cross and captious?

Evening came. Reginald was as much out of sorts as a fairly well-behaved gentleman could be. What with one impediment or another, two whole days had passed since he spoke to Miss Maverick—save in the ordinary commonplaces of the family circle—and he was feeling decidedly savage. To add to his annoyance, Miss Maverick seemed in no wise to sympathise with his discomfort, or even to notice his state of mind.

He sat moodily in a corner, watching her with jealous admiration, for she was looking her very best. The soft white dress that she wore was perfection, with the scarlet fuchsias drooping at her throat and in her black braids, and her pale face was made even more brilliant and striking, by contrast with the fair red and white dames around her—and Reginald was driven almost to desperation by a well-meant word from his aunt.

"Miss Maverick looks wonderfully well to-night," said that smiling matron. "I shouldn't be surprised if Mr. Sarmiento were growing really interested in her. What a fortunate thing it would be!—and he is a good man."

"I wish you'd not talk nonsense, aunt!" came the peevish retort.

"Well, it may be nonsense; I dare say it won't turn out to be anything else," laughed Mrs. Lanster: "but the best of us are match-makers, you know. Have you a headache to night, Regy?—you seem out of sorts."

"Yes," he nodded, "an awful headache." Headache and heartache also, he might have added, had he dared. Mrs. Lanster moved away, leaving him in a fever of impatience.

There, at the opposite end of the room, stood Katherine, in her stately beauty; and Mr. Sarmiento at her side talking with her.

"How is it that you shun me?" abruptly demanded the young fellow, accosting her when he got an opportunity.

"But I do not shun you," she answered, smiling.

"You do. You are ever with—with somebody or other," retorted Reginald. "Why, it's days and days since we had one of our pleasant walks by the sea."

"Is it!"

"Don't you mean ever to go for a walk with me again?"

"Indeed, yes—if you wish me to. I will go for a walk to-morrow morning if you like, the first thing after breakfast."

His brow cleared a little; his tones grew smoother.

"That is a bargain, mind you, Miss Maverick; a promise."

"To be sure it is. I will keep it, weather permitting. Dot"—touching that young lady's arm, who was approaching Katherine with a message from her mother—"will go with us."

This was not exactly what Mr. Reginald wanted; but he could not decently object to Dot's company. Katherine was called upon to sing; and no more was said.

In the morning they took the walk, the three of them, the weather being all sunshine and sweetness. Rather a long walk they made of it, strolling hither and thither, and did not get home until close upon one o'clock. There, news awaited them: Mr. Sarmiento was gone.

"Gone!" exclaimed Dot. "Why, what's he gone for? He said nothing about going at breakfast."

"No," said Mrs. Lanster, "I do not think he decided until later. He had some business letters this morning, and was uncertain whether to go or write. He made his mind up all at once; and he left his best adieux to you all."

"Much obliged to him," returned Regy, in a semi-sarcastic, semi-jesting tone. "Is he gone for good?"

"Oh yes," said Mrs. Lanster. "Quite for good."

At which assurance Mr. Reginald went into the seventh heaven.

"Miss Maverick," began Dot, that same day, when the two girls were alone together, "do you know that mamma is disappointed."

"What at?" innocently asked Katherine.

"At Mr. Sarmiento's going off in this abrupt way, without saying anything to you."

Katherine, who was leaning half out of the open window, thoughtfully twirling a carnation about in her fingers—they were in her bedroom—turned to look at Dot.

"But why? he could not help it. What should he have to say to me, more than to you and Reginald?"

Dot laughed. "Don't be angry, Katherine, but mamma has been privately nourishing a little romance. Mr. Sarmiento was so greatly taken with you; he seemed to like so much to be with you and to talk to you, that she thought he might have some intention of—of proposing to you."

Katherine Maverick stared like one puzzled. "Oh Dot!"

"Have I offended you?" breathed Dot, for the tone was half an angry one. "I did not mean to."

"No, my dear, you have not offended me: I was only surprised," spoke Katherine Maverick. "Believe me, Dora—and I hope you will repeat this to your mother—that neither by word nor by look did Mr. Sarmiento ever hint at such a thing. Such an idea would not have crossed his brain for a moment, and I am sure it never crossed mine. The whole world might have heard every word he said to me. He used to converse on general topics—and about my dead father—and sometimes he would speak of his little girl—Emma."

"Well, it was a notion mamma took up. But, Katherine—could you not see that he liked you?"

"The word, 'like,' has various bearings, Dot, my dear. Mr. Sarmiento liked me as an acquaintance; I feel sure of that: and I saw that he did, rather, seek to converse with me. Once or twice a very ambitious idea did creep in, in regard to the why and the wherefore: but not the outrageously ambitious idea that you hint at, child."

"And what is your ambitious idea, Katherine?"

Katherine blushed. "I know I must be very foolish, Dot; but I fancied it just possible that he might be thinking I should make a suitable governess to his child.—And what a change it would have been for me from that school! That is the only notion that ever entered my mind upon the subject, Dora, upon my honour."

"Yes, that would have been nice for you," sighed Dot. "It is all at an end now."

"Quite at an end: and I was silly. No harm is done, my dear."

Katherine Maverick spoke the truth. Mr. Sarmiento seemed as far above her, in regard to any closer connection, as the sky; and she had never glanced at anything so preposterous. A grave, sensible, good man, rich and grand and great, and good-looking withal; and she a poor music-mistress!

She hated the prospect of returning to the school, and to its drudgery; from which there was never any intermission from Monday morning till Saturday night, no elevating companionship, no interchange of higher thoughts. If she could but escape it! her heart felt faint at times at the very hopelessness of the wish.

A few evenings after the departure of Mr. Sarmiento, when the stars were beginning to peep out in the heavens through the deepening twilight, Reginald betook himself to the terrace with his cigar, and sat down there out of humour. The house was very silent. Dora was spending the day with a young friend, and Mrs. Lanster retired to her room when dinner was over, complaining of indisposition. Miss Maverick disappeared also—and that was the sore point with Reginald.

"She might have been civil enough to stay with a fellow," he grumbled, tilting himself back in the light chair. "Did she fear I should eat her?—There's the moon now!"

What harm the unoffending moon could do him, rising above the trees in its beauty, he best knew. But his meditations were none of the

pleasantest, his mind was on the rack. To be, or not to be, was the momentous question he was always debating with himself.

The leaves rustled gently in the cool night breeze; beyond that, no sound was audible. The cigar finished, Reginald folded his arms, and fell into a waking dream. Light footsteps aroused him from it. Miss Maverick was coming up the garden, her scarlet shawl folded round her shoulders over her white dress.

"You out here!" exclaimed Reginald. His face, illumined by the moonlight, showed his delight more plainly than words could have done. "I was thinking how awfully solitary it was. Do sit down a minute; here's a chair."

"I was so restless," she answered, smiling, as she took the chair. "I think I must have felt like Herodias' daughter—compelled to wander: and so I wrapped myself in this great shawl and went out.

"What was it my aunt hinted at, during dinner—just a word or two—about your going away? What did it mean?"

"I did not hear it. But I am going to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" echoed Reginald. "Was it purposely kept from me?"

"It has not been 'kept' at all from you, that I am aware of. I only knew it myself to-day."

"I thought you had another week to stay here?"

"To-morrow is the day I am due. Mrs. Lanster wrote to Miss Poole to beg for another week for me, and had her answer this morning—no, I must go back to my duties at the time appointed. Your good aunt did not tell me until just before dinner."

"It's shameful!" cried Regy, much disturbed.

"It is worse for me than for anybody else," said poor Katherine. "After all these pleasant days here to have to return to Purgatory!"

"That's a strong word," said Reginald.

She smiled faintly. "It is what the girls have christened the school. Shall you think of me sometimes when I am gone?"

"Think of you!" repeated he with feeling, his young face painfully earnest. "Katherine! must you *really* go?"

"Why, of course I must," she answered, her own face full of pain.

"You must not go."

"But I must go. What else can I do?"

"You can marry me," he replied, so suddenly that he was almost startled at himself. "I love you, Katherine, and you know it."

"No, no," she whispered in agitation.

"But I say Yes, yes. Katherine, you cannot *think* of leaving me to despair. What would my life be worth to me now without you? Oh, my love, be mine!"

She turned to him with an impulse of tenderness, took his hand and clasped it between both of hers.

"You are very generous, Reginald, and I thank you; I thank you truly. But it must not be. Think of your family!"

"Bother my family!" was the energetic response. "I want you

for my wife, not my family's." Nevertheless a qualm of conscience took him as he spoke, in spite of his bravery and his defiant feeling.

She slightly shook her head; *she* knew. Reginald had released his own hand and imprisoned hers.

"Besides"—rather hesitatingly—"our ages are incompatible. I am older than you."

"I am twenty-one. I am my own master."

"I am twenty-five," she quietly rejoined. "You—forgive me, Reginald, for saying so—are but a boy."

"I am not a boy," retorted Reginald. "I am master, I tell you, of myself and of my fortune. It is two thousand a-year; it will be more later."

Two thousand a-year, versus her life of toil! What a vista it was!—what a temptation!

"At twenty-five a woman seems quite old, compared with a boy of twenty-one. The world knows it to be so, Reginald."

"I am old enough to know my own mind and heart, and I love you, Katherine. Oh, my dear one, I cannot give you up!"

She had risen; one slender hand lay on the elbow of the chair, with the other she held her shawl together at the throat; and Reginald, his handsome face full of entreaty, stood beside her.

"Katherine, speak to me," he said. But she stood silent.

It was her one chance, she told herself; the one only chance she should probably ever have in life. Here was Reginald Lanster willing, pleading, to make her his wife in love; no more dreary teaching, no more worrying care. It was an overwhelming temptation: but still Katherine Maverick stood silent.

On the soft hand which rested on the chair, a golden band with a sapphire stone glittered: it was a ring which Dot had given her; and it brought the loving, innocent little girl forcibly to her remembrance. She thought how the child had opened her heart to her in perfect and entire trust when whispering of her love for Regy. She thought how fragile and delicate the girl was—how cruel would be the shock to her when she learnt the extent of the treachery enacted against her by the two beings she esteemed most in all the world: "and she loves him," added Katherine. "No, I cannot do this."

The warm pressure of Regy's hand fell on hers, hiding the ring from view. "Why do you hesitate, Katherine?" he breathed. But she stood yet in silence.

It had not quite passed, the temptation. How strong it yet was, she never afterwards liked to recall.

"Treachery, and worse than treachery," she thought; "treachery in more ways than one, and to others beside Dot. Shall I *thus* requite Mr. and Mrs. Lanster—who have been kindness itself to me?—worse than all, shall I store up for myself before heaven a remorseful conscience that would never be at rest? No, no, *no*. Painful days and weary nights to my life's end, rather than that."

"Katherine!" he murmured softly—and then his face came nearer, bent closer, and for a single moment he drew her head down on his shoulder, and pressed his lips to hers.

"Don't, Reginald," she faintly cried, drawing away and standing erect before him. "It was a great temptation, but my better angel was with me and I have conquered. What you ask can never be—do you not see what treachery we should both be guilty of—I especially? It has been very pleasant here, pleasanter, I dare say, than any time for me will ever be again, but to-night ends it."

"Can you be so cruel!" he burst forth, his eyes filling.

"You may think me cruel now, but you will know better in time, and then you may thank me. Perhaps in the days to come, when you and Dot are a happy husband and wife, you will invite me to stay a week with you. But I shall never come here before that. We will say good-bye now—and I thank you for all, Reginald."

Some feeling in his own heart told him she was right. He clasped her to him with a great sob, and took another kiss from her lips.

And so, the next day, Katherine Maverick went away——back to the dreary school, with the good wishes of Dot and all her friends, but with a lonesome, weary ache in her heart.

"I shall never forget you," breathed Reginald, as he saw her into the carriage; "you might have made my life's sunshine, Katherine."

She smiled faintly as she waved her hand to him in the distance. "It was my one chance," she thought again: "but I am thankful my resolution held out, not to take it. And now for Purgatory!"

She had been back in Purgatory only a week or two, when one morning a servant came to the class-room with a message: A gentleman had called to see Miss Maverick.

Very much surprised, Katherine, pencil in hand, and black-stuff apron on—as all the teachers were required to wear—went to the parlour, and saw Mr. Sarmiento. He had come to ask her to be governess to his little daughter.

"Oh, I should like it; I know I should like it," she said, her face beaming with pleasure. "But I'm afraid——"

"Afraid of what?" asked Mr. Sarmiento, smiling.

"I do not think Miss Poole will release me."

"Supposing Miss Poole does release you—is it what will suit you?—what you deem yourself fitted for—the charge of one little girl?"

"I truly think so," answered Katherine.

"She is rather a rebellious child and requires firm management. My good old aunt, who lives with me, and has much indulged her, confesses that Emma is getting beyond her control. But dear Aunt Rachel is just as mild as milk, and Emma knows that quite well."

"I do not fear being able to train her," spoke Miss Maverick, with a beaming face. "I shall begin by making her love me."

"Just so; make her love you," returned Mr. Sarmiento in a pleased tone. "I need not say, Miss Maverick, that you will be entirely as

one of ourselves in my home; regarded as a visitor, not as a governess. And with regard to remuneration, Rachel thought about a hundred a-year—if you would consider that sufficient."

"A hundred a-year!" cried Katherine, breathlessly. "For me! Why I only get twelve pounds here. That is why I have to dress so plainly."

"Then we will say it is settled," returned Mr. Sarmiento.

"Oh, if it might be!" sighed Katherine, her ardour damped. "But there's Miss Poole."

"Kindly leave Miss Poole to me."

"I should not like to seem ungrateful—and she has just raised my salary," debated Katherine. "Two pounds more. Until this term I had but ten."

"I will settle matters with Miss Poole," he answered, laughing.

Two years later. Reginald Lanster and his young wife were on a visit to Mr. and Mrs. Sarmiento.

"What geese we were in those old days, Katherine!" exclaimed Reginald, in a moment of confidence: for he was just as out-spoken as ever. "So silly and foolish."

"Speak for yourself, if you please, sir," laughed Mrs. Sarmiento. "I think I was the contrary. Ah, Reginald, fate and fortune judged better for us than we were inclined then to judge for ourselves. Had I been the goose implied, you might be a less happy man now than you are. We should never have suited one another, you and I."

"Well no, I dare say not," candidly acknowledged Reginald. "You'd have been too clever for me; too sensible. Dot is the dearest little wife in the world, but she has not a bit of cleverness in her; she gives in to me in all respects."

"Just so," said Katherine. "And *I* should have lectured you, and kept you in order—which you'd not have liked. Whatever *is*, is right, you know. There is a far wider truth in that assertion, Reginald, than the world generally realizes."

"Yes, I thought of Katherine as my possible wife when I was staying those few days with your father and mother," answered Mr. Sarmiento to Dot, when they were conversing together of old times. "I was very much taken with her. I came home and talked it over with Rachel; she was always telling me I ought to marry again; and we agreed to invite Miss Maverick here as the child's governess, that I might have the opportunity of seeing more of her, and deciding for it or against it."

"And you decided for it," nodded Dot, approvingly.

"I did; and shortly, too. Dear Katherine! I often think it was heaven itself that threw the chance in my way."

F. P. A.



ROBERT BARNES. R. AND E. TAYLOR

EVELYN CHOSE TO GO INTO THE LITTLE ROOM WHERE THEY HAD TAKEN LUNCH, AND SAT DOWN IN SILENCE.

THE ARGOSY.

NOVEMBER, 1882.

MRS. RAVEN'S TEMPTATION.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "DR. HARDY'S MARRIAGE."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE STRANGER IN CHURCH.

THERE is this striking difference between trouble which has hope and trouble which has despair: the former makes a pause in life, the usual course of things may stop, just because it may be presently resumed; but when once despair enters, we make a forlorn struggle to keep things going, feeling that what we once let drop may well be dropped for ever.

After Leonard's first attack, Mrs. Raven did not appear at church for many Sundays, and Evelyn had kept her company at home for two or three of them. But on Christmas morning, Frank and Evelyn went out to attend the Christmas service together.

The little church was decorated in the old-fashioned style. Modern taste might scoff at the huge boughs of holly simply bound to the lamps, or wound round the sturdy old pillars, but the Vicar's pride lay in the number and hue of the bright berries thereon, and he would have thought the introduction of sham coral or artificial flowers nothing short of desecration.

The sound of the joyful, familiar hymns somewhat softened Frank's mood, and when, glancing down at his companion, he noticed that her lips were tremulous and her eyes suffused with tears, his feelings towards her grew quite kindly, and he felt remorseful for his suspicions and coldness.

When the service was over, and he rose to leave the church, Evelyn put out her hand and caught him back. "Wait—wait a moment!"

Frank sat down again. But Evelyn stood up, and watched the crowd moving from the back seats. It was not till the building was nearly empty that she stirred.

"Can't we go back some other way than through the village and by the lodge?" she whispered hurriedly, as they walked down the

empty aisle. "Isn't there a little gate off the churchyard through which we could get inside the Court-grounds at once?"

"Yes," said Frank, "there is; and I suppose the master-key of all the Court-gates which I carry will open that too. But I'm not sure what sort of a path we shall find when we get inside, for it is never used, and I've not been that way for years."

"Oh, never mind that," she answered; "we shall manage somehow. I do so want to escape the crowd!"

That at least they succeeded in doing. The people had left the churchyard, but still lingered in the high road, quite certain that the two would pass that way, and desirous of showing them the civility of courtesy and good wishes.

Frank's head ached; and he was not sorry for the refuge offered by the gate, though when they passed within it, he found his forebodings fulfilled, and they were in the midst of a thicket of small growing trees. But he saw that the bushes were set well back from the fence, and that by skirting it they might make their way through. They had to walk in Indian file, however, and could hear the voices on the other side, communicating their domestic interests, and commiserating the latest bad news about the Squire.

"I'm afraid I've been rather stupid to-day," Frank said kindly, as he followed Evelyn; "but I really feel very unwell. Leonard's illness last night gave me a shock. How you have recovered as you have is more than I can tell, when you were so poorly before it."

She paused, and half turned round. "I think women are stronger than men," she said. "They can't lift such weights or run so fast, but they can bear more, and go through more. You must have a glass of wine the moment we get home."

"Dear me," said Frank, playfully, "what is that sound? Something seems to have taken fright." It was somebody at the other side of the wall who started off into a rapid run.

Evelyn did not seem to notice the slight remark. "Look at Aunt Gertrude!" she said. "I don't believe any of you men, though you admire her so much, half realise what her life has been. You may see what she has borne and done—but do you ever remember what she has gone without? You never think of the bright rooms and the pleasant holidays and the nice dresses that she has foregone. She has never said a word about these things to me; yet they would have been as great a delight to her as they are to anybody. You don't think of these things!"

"I should as soon think of them in connection with an angel in heaven," answered Frank.

"I must go and see Aunt Gertrude soon. She seems to me like a refuge from one's self and from the world! I suppose these are Christmas feelings," she broke off, with a light laugh, as they reached the Court. "But I must not forget your wine. You really look white and wan. Mrs. Raven must not see you so."

She went straight to the dining-room, Frank following her.

A solitary decanter, with a little wine in it, stood on the sideboard. Possibly Evelyn did not think it looked very attractive, or she wished to offer Frank a choice of wines. For she opened the wine-cooler, and looked in. But it was empty.

"I know how that is," said Frank, watching her. "Budd is making a clearance of everything, that all may be started fresh and full for the festival of Christmas dinner! Poor old Budd will stick to his traditions! Kindly pour me out the wine there is."

Evelyn obeyed. And as she handed him the glass, he noticed that her hand trembled.

"I'm afraid you are not so much better as you seem," he said; "while I am a selfish wretch, making an unnecessary fuss over myself." At that moment James Sloam came in, bearing the great silver salver.

"You may as well take these away with you," Evelyn said, handing the boy the empty decanter and glass.

There was to be only one guest at dinner—the Vicar—whose invitation had been issued long before Leonard's last attack. But this morning Mrs. Raven had sent Mr. Toynbee an intimation that she trusted he would not allow their fresh calamity to deprive them of the solace and cheer of his society.

Frank had two or three hours at his disposal before dressing for dinner. He felt suddenly weary and drowsy. Perhaps there was little wonder in that. Going to his own chamber, he lay down. He must have sunk to sleep then and there, for he remembered no more, nor had he the least idea whether he had slept for hours or moments, when he was awakened, with a sudden start, by the sound of a violent crash in the hall below.

He sat upright. He heard many feet running. Then a woman's voice spoke sharply, and there were sounds as of the picking up and gathering of fragments. Clearly it was only one of those domestic accidents which seemed predestined to happen on occasions when the best family china and glass are brought out.

Frank had only time to hope that the accident would neither shock Leonard's unconsciousness nor startle his nurses, when he became aware that his own room seemed rapidly spinning round him, and that his couch had apparently taken on the motion of a boat. In another moment he was deadly sick.

The sickness was short as it was violent. He lay back trembling, and with a singular sensation of weakness, but entirely relieved from his drowsiness and giddiness.

He lay so for some time. He remembered afterwards that he dreamily wondered whether people recovering from falls or from drowning might not feel much as he did. As the trembling subsided, and a little strength returned, he bethought him of the hour: to his surprise, he found it only wanted half an hour to dinner-time.

Whether the time had passed so quickly before or after his sickness, he could hardly determine, but he at once scrambled up, and proceeded to dress, though he had to sit down and rest two or three times during that process. He had scarcely finished his toilet, when Budd knocked hurriedly at the door to say that the Vicar was coming up the avenue, and there was nobody in the drawing-room to receive him. With a great effort, Frank managed to descend the stairs by the time Mr. Toynbee opened the hall door.

"My dear fellow," cried the Vicar, "what's the matter with you? You look like a ghost!"

"Hush!" said Frank. "I have just recovered from a smart bilious attack, and I don't want my mother to hear of it."

"A bilious attack before one's Christmas dinner is altogether unnatural," observed Mr. Toynbee good-humouredly. "And what of Leonard?" he added, with genuine concern. "Another fit? Poor fellow! poor fellow! And is your mother keeping up bravely?"

"I will answer for myself," said Mrs. Raven, gliding into the room, and catching his last words. "I hope I am. One grows accustomed to pain, I think, as eyes grow used to a darkened room."

"Leonard is not conscious yet?" asked Mr. Toynbee.

"He opened his eyes once," she answered, "and said something which I could not catch. Another time he spoke in his sleep, and said: 'A face at the window!'"

"What did that mean?"

"You have not heard that this attack came on last night with his starting up, and pointing to the curtains which Frank had not drawn quite closely after he looked out at the weather."

"The delusion again!" commented the Vicar, feelingly. "The same delusion evidently adapting itself to the altered circumstances. He had been worse all the week. I noticed that."

Dinner was gone through somehow. Frank and the Vicar lingered in the dining-room a little after the ladies left. The Vicar poured out another glass of claret for himself, and pushed the jug to Frank, but the young man set it aside.

"By-the-way, Frank," said the old clergyman, "when you and I were talking over the ghost rumours a little while back, do you remember my mentioning a stranger—a dark young man—whom I had seen sitting on the suicide's grave? He was in church to-day. So I suppose he is somebody's city cousin, who comes down here for change of air and holidays. Maybe some relation of Miss Wilmot—that's the old maid newly come to the post-office, you know. She's got a crowd of orphan nephews and nieces to help."

Frank did not show much interest in the matter, with which he could not see that he had the least concern.

In the drawing-room the evening was rather a dull one. Evelyn played some hymns and carols, but she couldn't sing, and Frank lay down on the sofa; and the clergyman, who saw his suffering

condition, good-naturedly did not even try to draw him into conversation; and he soon left.

It was a fine moonlight night. To pass the post-office would not take him far out of his road to the Vicarage. He could not tell why he felt curious to know whether this young stranger, twice seen now, was really one of Miss Wilmot's nephews. But he did so feel. And Miss Wilmot was a stranger, in reduced circumstances, and lonely like himself. It would be no unneighbourly action, but quite the reverse, to look in and have a few minutes' chat with her.

The door was only on the latch. When the Vicar opened it she looked up sharply, expecting to see somebody making petition for stores from her shop.

But when she saw who it was she rose. Miss Wilmot had a low opinion of the world, because she did not consider it had appreciated herself, whom she held—and not undeservedly—in high esteem. But she thought better of the Vicar than of most people. There were times when she even thought the world did not seem to have appreciated him either!

"I thought I'd look in and give you all seasonable good wishes," he said genially. "I suppose you've got some of your young people down with you, keeping you company at this festive time?"

"Oh dear no, sir," returned Miss Wilmot. "It is not to be expected; they have livelier places to go to than this. They only come here when they want something from me."

"Oh, come, Miss Wilmot! I can't have you talk like that."

"But it's true," she persisted. "A lone woman knows she's got to be put upon in all ways. Would any man, sir, have bought a business in a place like this," and she looked contemptuously round her demesne; "a little poky pigsty, that has not been touched for fifty years?"

"It certainly ought to be made lighter and airier," the Vicar admitted. "I must say a good word for you up at the Court. You'll be glad to hear that the Squire's doing pretty well, though I'm afraid it is a bad case. But we think he's getting on all right for this time."

"I'm glad to hear it, sir," said Miss Wilmot. "I had a notion there was more danger. Do you think there mayn't be danger that isn't mentioned to his mother?"

"I think not," answered the Vicar, wondering at the peculiar tone. "I'll not forget to speak about your repairs the first favourable opportunity. Good-night now, and a happy New Year to you."

"The same to you, sir; but it's a week off yet, and nobody knows what may happen between then and now. I do hope the Squire will be no worse, that's all. Thank you for looking in, sir. Good-night."

"For if there's nothing extra-dangerous with the Squire," mused the post-mistress, when she was left to herself, "then, for what on earth did that still, stuck-up nurse that they call Hannah write to Mrs. Raven's brother-in-law at Coltburn? I know her writing: 'The

Rev. Mr. Connell,' as large as life, and marked 'Immediate,' and posted the letter herself early this morning. And of course, she knows my tongue's tied! That is, if she thought of me. Folks think that post-people have no eyes nor ears, nor natural curiosity!"

CHAPTER XL.

DUST ON THE CARPET.

FRANK rose next day not quite recovered from the previous suffering. He had no appetite for his breakfast. He sipped a little coffee and nibbled a little toast, and went back to his own room, fit for nothing but to lie down and rest. He knew that Budd had a list of all the small douceurs to be distributed among the lower class of dependents, who had not been remembered on Christmas Eve with "the Squire's compliments," and he hoped not to be disturbed till lunch-time. Vain hope! For he had not been there an hour, and was just dropping into a soothing doze, when Budd's firm, quiet rap fell on his door, and he heard the words:

"A telegram come for you, sir."

Frank sprang up. The message was from his Uncle Connell, and it said:

"I am just now starting for Ravenscourt. Do not announce my coming till you see me."

Frank was mystified: but only for a moment. The next instant he decided that his uncle had got some information from the detectives, which would be best imparted personally. Of course, the Connells knew nothing as yet of the renewed blow which had fallen on the Court family on Christmas Eve, for there had been nothing in it so urgent as to suggest a special message; rather it tended towards that chronic sort of trouble which tempts to dull silence and endurance.

Frank marvelled what the coming revelation would be—he felt sure there would be one. But he knew he would not have to wonder long. The train must be already swiftly bearing Mr. Connell in the track of his telegram. He thrust his uncle's missive into his pocket, lay back again, and soon relapsed into the slumber from which Budd's knock had aroused him. His last waking thoughts were contradictory—the one being, "Is it because I have a good constitution that it insists thus upon repairing itself after the least damage?" and the other, "Can this be the earliest sign of the hereditary taint now manifold in my poor brother? Is the genuineness of our relationship to be proven in this terrible way?"

As he slept, he dreamed—a strange dream.

He heard a bell tolling, and he knew it was a death-knell for somebody. And there was a woman in black, walking up and down, whose face he could not see—but he knew she was Evelyn Agate. And

something fell at her feet with a loud crack, and was broken. It was the red intaglio ring, and the stone had come loose from its setting. And the black figure picked up the hollowed gold frame, and the metal melted in her fingers and ran down her garment. And the stone lay on the floor. And he knew it was left there for him.

He woke slowly this time, with his heart thumping heavily in his side. There was Budd's voice speaking outside the door, again. And this time its tones were a little querulous.

"The lunch bell has been a-ringing ever so long, sir," said Budd, "and Miss Evelyn has sent me up at last, sir, to see if anything is the matter."

"All right, all right, coming in a minute!" cried Frank, thinking to himself: "So much for my tragic vision, whose component parts are evidently a lunch bell, a memory, and Budd's knock. Dear me, it is high time I began to feel strong again! If I'm not better before night, I'll speak to Dr. Wragge."

He went downstairs. Lunch was set, as it often was, not in the big dining-room, but in a little ante-chamber, furnished only by a small square table, some black Italian chairs, a thick Turkey carpet, and a few faded oil paintings. The luncheon was always an informal meal, for which nobody was expected to be punctual. Evelyn's urgency in the present instance was only explained by the fact that Mrs. Sims, out of consideration for her young master's recent indisposition, had sent up for him a basin of soup, whose savoury odour reached him as he approached the door of the room, in whose archway stood Evelyn, with an expression of countenance half-worried, half-scared, and wholly restless and unhappy.

"Oh, I am sorry if I have kept you waiting," cried Frank. "I never heard the bell—or rather I heard it and made it up into a dream, for I had fallen asleep."

"You have not kept me waiting," she answered, in a fretful tone. "I have had my lunch long ago, and have been in and out of the room several times, but I knew that soup was prepared specially for you."

"I'm a spoiled baby," said Frank, sitting down, and sipping the soup. But either its flavour did not come up to its savour, or his appetite was still unreliable, for he only took two or three spoonfuls, and then began to dawdle.

"Dear me!" he cried, looking at the floor beside him; "somebody has come in here with very dirty feet—or what can this mess be? It cannot be footprints," he added, looking towards the door, "for there are none in that direction. The housemaid must have shaken her dust-pan, or Budd has dropped something from the scuttle."

"It is only light dust," said Evelyn; "I will clear it away in a moment." And she seized the hearth-broom and a newspaper, and proceeded to make good her word, in spite of Frank's remonstrances.

Still he could not enjoy his soup, and sat toying with his spoon. Evelyn stood in the long window, half-leaning against its side.

"Mr. Frank," she said, suddenly, speaking with an effort, "I must go home to London. I wish I could go by the next train."

"You haven't had any bad news," asked Frank, alarmed.

"No," she said, in the same odd, half-defiant tone. "No—don't you remember I told you yesterday that I felt I must see Aunt Gertrude soon? Something is driving me to it. How do I know that she may not be wanting me as much as I want her?" she added, with a spice of mockery in her voice, which yet did not deduct from the urgency of her manner. "I really must go."

"I'm sure my mother would wish to gratify a feeling of this kind," Frank answered. "You remember she asked whether you would not like to spend Christmas with your aunt. But you declined then."

"Yes, I know," said Evelyn. "But now I—I must go."

"Don't be uneasy. Need you be in quite such a hurry? Can't you wait till to-morrow? It will be a personal favour to me."

He used the last phrase in sheer desperation. The deadly giddiness and sickness were creeping up again, and if he would not sink to the floor where he stood, he must hurry away to his couch.

Evelyn looked at him silently, but made no answer. Frank could not linger then for further parley.

"Will you kindly tell Budd to send Dr. Wragge to my room when he comes," he said, faintly. "Please also say that if any unexpected visitor arrives, I must be told immediately."

He turned and left her standing mute by the luncheon-table. She expressed no concern, offered no sympathy. As he went through the door, she took one hasty step after him, and stretched out her hands, as if she wanted to say something.

But he was gone, and had not seen the gesture.

She went back to the window, opened it, put out her head, looked slowly and cautiously round, then drew back into the room and secured the casement by a heavy hasp, which was seldom fastened even at night. Then she drew a side-table right across the width of the window. It was a heavy table, though it had a slight appearance; and it took all her good strength to move it. Then she rang the bell.

"Dear, dear," Budd ventured to say, as he packed his tray, "the young master hasn't taken his soup! He can't be himself again yet."

"No, not quite," said Evelyn. And she delivered Frank's orders.

There were head-shakings and lamentations when Budd carried the news of Frank's continued indisposition to the servants' quarters.

"Master Frank wouldn't ask for the doctor for nothing," bewailed Mrs. Sims. "There, James Sloam, take you that cup of soup and finish it up, for it's better than anything you've ever tasted, and it 'ud be a sin and a shame to waste it."

CHAPTER XLI.

A CLUE TRACED HOME.

THERE was only one person who passed out over the threshold of Ravenscourt that afternoon. It was Nurse Hannah. She went straight to the railway station. Getting there just before the train, which would bring any travellers from Coltburn, arrived.

The Reverend Mr. Connell was leaning from his carriage window as the train drew up. He expected he should see his nephew Frank. But instead of Frank Raven, he saw a face with which he had been familiar enough in Coltburn streets—the quiet, contented face of a working-woman, yet in early middle-age. He never saw her before in the nurse's cloak and close bonnet.

"Mrs. Cran?" he questioned, as he went towards her. She curtsied, and answered in a significant tone: "Nurse Hannah, at your service, sir."

"I suppose your husband knows that you have written to me?"

"You may be sure of that, sir. And he knows a great deal more. He's not far off now, sir," she observed, looking neither to the right nor to the left.

The Minister glanced furtively around. Everybody had already left the station, except one shabby man, with a shade over his left eye, who was resting a pack upon his knee, and busily re-arranging its paltry contents. Could that possibly be the trim and active Cran? Nurse Hannah gave a merry little laugh.

"And so you've found out something at last?" asked Mr. Connell, as he walked on by her side.

"I found out on Christmas Eve who the woman-ghost is," she answered. "I suspected her all along, though Cran wouldn't be sure."

It was clear that in his own house, even the astute Cran had to bear the humiliating feminine "I told you so."

"And ——" prompted the Minister.

"And it's only Miss Evelyn Agate," said the nurse, quietly.

Mr. Connell almost stood still.

"I haven't found out the man who walks with her yet," she went on; "but that can't take long now. She goes out in her green dressing-gown. And it isn't through the Court doors that she goes at that hour, you may be sure, sir. But in the corridor leading to the conservatory, there is a low window that is never hasped."

"Are you sure it is she? May not the disguise deceive you?"

"Sir," said the woman, "I watched. I saw the light-dressed figure first, and then all of a sudden, young miss in her black silk evening-dress. I went back over the path she'd come, and there I picked up a green dressing-gown. She'd slipped it off. She went back to look

for it afterwards, and not finding it, hasn't been quite easy in her mind, I think, ever since. It's a common green cashmere, been mended in one or two places. There's been a bit of the hem-lining torn out, and a strip of sprigged muslin sewn in, and even that's got a little torn, too, in its turn."

"Dear, dear," cried Mr. Connell, lost in amazement. "I know about that sprigged muslin. My nephew seems to have had some suspicion raised about that. For he had seen some of that sort belonging to our governess, and he wrote asking her where she had got it: she told him she had bought it at a shop in Gerstowe, and had the remnant still. It came out accidentally later that my eldest daughter had taken a bit from the governess's work-basket, and given it to Miss Agate to mend something with while she was staying at our house. I did not think it worth while to write again to say that."

Nurse Hannah shook her head. "You gentlefolks who mean to tell the truth, and try to choose what is worth telling, give us more trouble than those who set themselves to deceive us. There's nothing puts one on the wrong scent so much as hearing the truth, with bits left out between. It is the very thing we do ourselves, sir, just to set folks off the track. How came I here, you ask, sir. Under the family doctor's orders, sir. I went to him, and all I told him and all he knows about me is gospel-truth. Only I did not tell him I was now married to Cran the detective."

"But," said Mr. Connell, half-pausing, and turning to the speaker, "what in the world does Miss Agate want to play the ghost for?"

"I don't know yet," admitted Nurse Hannah. "She does not 'walk' alone. Some hostile influence was bearing on the Raven family before the coming here of the girl. She may be an active agent in it, or only one of its tools."

"I suppose I needn't ask whether you know Miss Evelyn Agate's own history?" asked the perplexed Minister. "Are you quite satisfied about the people who brought her up? My own son is friendly with them, and has great faith in them."

"Oh, they are all right," answered the nurse promptly. "My husband has had his eye on them; he soon found all was open and above board there. They have had their quarrel with the world right out, poor things. There's something queer about their servant, though. We shall be sorry if this young minx brings more trouble on the Agates," said the nurse, with a touch of tenderness.

"And have you suspicion of anybody else in the Court household —of collusion in any quarter—or anything of that kind? Who the other can be that walks abroad with her at night?"

Nurse Hannah shook her head. "I have my own suspicions," she said; "we all have them, say what we may. You're one of the family, sir, and must have heard of a man called Eldred Sloam, descended in a certain way from the old Squire Eldred. It seems his mother was a sister of Mrs. Charity Hale, who——But, dear me, sir,'

broke off the nurse, as they came in view of the Court, "there must be something wrong!—look at the bustling to and fro!"

They quickened their pace. Janet Mackay came running towards them.

"Oh, Mrs. Hannah, we've been looking for you high and low. There's Master Frank lying insensible in his bed-room, and there's poor James Sloam taken mortally bad in the kitchen. We've sent off all ways for the doctors, and ——"

"Hush!" said Nurse Hannah, authoritatively. "This gentleman is the Reverend Mr. Connell, Mrs. Raven's brother-in-law. Will you come, sir, to Mr. Frank's room?"

Mrs. Raven was already there, and so were Budd and Sims. Everybody made way for Nurse Hannah, and nobody took much heed of Mr. Connell. The experienced woman proceeded to make a few rapid observations, and then prepared for stringent measures.

"What had Mr. Frank taken last?" she asked, as she went forward with her preparations.

"A beautiful basin of soup; as good soup as ever you saw," protested Mrs. Sims. "Leastway, he did not take it—but a drop or two. I gave it to poor James."

"And he's ill too!" said the nurse.

"Ma'am," said Sims, reproachfully, "you ought to know the young master was ill yesterday. He was as sick as could be, and he'd had then only a glass of wine, the last in the decanter. Miss Agate sent it down to be cleaned afterwards."

"Was it cleaned?" asked the nurse. Her questions seemed put almost in absent-mindedness.

"No," said the housekeeper; "there's no bottle-washing about my place on Christmas Day. It was put away as it was."

"Just go down and see how James is, and do for him as you see I am doing for Mr. Frank: and you may bring that decanter upstairs and give it to Mr. Connell to take care of. Who served up lunch to-day—you, Budd, I suppose?" added the nurse.

"Yes, ma'am, I did," said the awed Budd.

"And who was in the room?"

"Only Miss Evelyn, ma'am," glancing across the bed to Mrs. Raven, who crouched there, with wrung hands. "My mistress did not come down to-day."

"Thank you, Budd. Now, Mr. Connell, may I trouble you to step this way for an instant."

She made as though she required his help in moving Frank. While he rendered it, she whispered to the minister:

"Please go in search of Miss Agate, and secure that she does not leave the house. Also please go down to the lodge-gate and stick a torn envelope on one of the palings there. That will bring in Cran."

Mr. Connell obeyed like one in a dream. He was fairly dumfounded by the unexpected and entirely tragic turn affairs had taken.

It was long before he could realise whether it was fact or imagination that, while he stood beside the motionless, cowering figure of Mrs. Raven, he had heard her murmur, more than once:

"Theodore—Theodore Agate! you are avenged!"

CHAPTER XLII.

THE LAST OF POOR JAMES.

Mr. Connell resolved to execute the latter part of his commission first. For there seemed to him to be no time to be lost in securing the presence of Cran. Nurse Hannah was very clever—almost too clever, he thought. Perhaps she was rash.

The Minister was shocked to find himself conscious of a certain humour in his errand, as he stretched himself on tiptoe, and thrust over the railing-head the envelope of some charitable circular which he chanced to have in his pocket. Mr. Connell would never again be able to pass a dangling string or a chalk hieroglyphic without a secret wonderment.

He made his way back to the house, and asked the first servant he met where Miss Evelyn was. The servant chanced to be a great crony of James Sloam's, and she was holding her apron to her eyes. She led him to Miss Evelyn's room.

Mr. Connell knocked boldly. There was a strange, shuffling sound in the room, as of some heavy article suddenly pushed along the ground. Then there was a second's pause, and then the voice of her he was seeking called "Come in," and at the same instant she unlocked the door.

"Miss Agate," he said, "there is terrible trouble in this house."

"Yes," she answered quietly, "I know that."

"The doctor will be here in a few minutes," he went on, struck and chilled by something in her manner. "In the meantime, I regret to say that I think the nurse suspects Mr. Frank has been in some way poisoned. We must have Mrs. Raven out of her son's chamber, before the medical man comes. I shall want your assistance to coax her downstairs, where we will both sit with her."

Evelyn did not answer him; indeed, she scarcely seemed to follow his words. Only she glanced back into her room; and his eyes followed hers. And then Mr. Connell saw something trivial in itself, but significant under the circumstances. The drapings of the toilet-table were slightly caught up, and revealed the handle of a small portmanteau, with its unfastened strap trailing out upon the carpet. This was the heavy thing whose hasty thrusting away Mr. Connell had heard. She had been preparing for an untimely departure.

The Minister became at once cool and ready. It was one thing to follow up suspicions which might be ill-grounded, and quite another

thing to face facts. He looked steadily at Evelyn. "I suppose I need not tell you, Miss Agate, that nobody may leave the Court on any pretence, and that any sign of secret movement is likely to attract suspicion."

"Oh, I can quite understand that," answered Evelyn, with a forced return to her ordinary glib manner. "And really it is very unfortunate for me, for I had been speaking to Mr. Frank about paying a short visit to my friends in London."

There was something in Evelyn's face which belied the confidence of her tone and words. It had hard and haggard lines in it now. She walked before him down the corridor. The doctors had come and were with Frank.

Evelyn chose to go into the little room where they had taken lunch, and sat down in silence. Mr. Connell stood by the window, gazing out at the sweet, still scene, with a pale afternoon sunlight on the tops of the bare trees.

The doctors left Frank for James Sloam: they judged him to be in more urgent need of aid. He lay in Budd's private room, on an old-fashioned horse-hair sofa. One or two of the younger servants and Charity Hale were with him. Mr. Connell and Evelyn followed the doctors in. Like Frank, he was unconscious, but Mr. Connell could see the difference between the condition of the sick boy and that of his young master. This one was clearly struck to death.

"You can't save him," said Charity, in a low, sad voice. Then turning to Evelyn, she added, "Dying beds are no place for fine ladies like you."

"Hush!" commanded Mr. Connell, imperatively. "Do the boy's friends live near?"

"He has not got any friends," said Charity, grimly. "He has only a father, and I've sent for him. And here he comes," she added, as Eldred Sloam entered.

"So our Jem is taken bad, is he?" cried the man.

"He's at death's door," said Charity, quietly; "the doctors won't be able to do anything. Mr. Frank and he have both taken something wrong, and Jem does not seem able to shake it off, as we hope the master is doing. It's at these times one's ways of living tell," she added, in stern and bitter rebuke of the negligent father, "and poor Jem lived mean enough till he came to the Court."

"Let the father come near," said Dr. Wragge.

The suffering boy's moans had almost ceased; the pinched, pained look was fading from his face, but something different from its accustomed homeliness was fast settling there. Eldred Sloam hesitated—he almost recoiled. Was this his boy Jem, his starved, neglected child, with the patient face? He had seen one like it before.

"He's turnin' like his mother, poor Jane," Eldred whispered.

"He always was like her," said Charity, sternly; "and those that are like in life, are always liker still in death."

"Jem, Jem," whispered Eldred, "don't you know me, Jem? Won't you open your eyes? Don't you know your father?"

A something passed over the still figure—a flutter—it seemed less within the frame than without it. It was life's last effort to respond to a familiar voice. The honest boyish blue eyes slightly opened, the lips parted with one or two words unheard. They left a smile behind them—the strange, surprised smile of the dead.

"Did he say aught to me?" asked Eldred chokingly.

"I'm sure he said something kind," said Mr. Connell. "See, that smile is left for you. His pain is all over now."

"But who gave the stuff to him?" demanded Eldred, taking refuge from remorseful grief in sudden indignation and sense of injury. "Who gave it to him? Took something wrong, did they, both of them—Jem and the master? What was it?"

"These are questions for us and the lawyers, my good friend," said Dr. Wragge, quietly; "and you may rest assured they shall not go unanswered long." The emptied basin of soup and the decanter and all such things had been secured.

They stood aside, to allow Evelyn and the other doctor to pass. Dr. Wragge and Mr. Connell exchanged glances. Dr. Wragge gave an almost imperceptible nod, and the Minister understood that he might resign his surveillance of the young lady into the hands of that other medical man. Eldred Sloam had observed Evelyn: his eyes seemed riveted to her.

"Who is that?—the young miss?" he whispered.

"Didn't you ever see her before?" asked Charity, with a peculiar dryness. "She saw you when you were raving, Eldred. She's a Miss Agate."

"I have never seen her before," he said, with strange interest. Meanwhile, Mr. Connell and Doctor Wragge stood in the passage, talking earnestly.

"It is an awful charge to bring against the girl!" whispered the Minister.

"It is an awful deed. But this man, Cran, says he holds clues to motives, and so forth."

"As yet we don't even know what poison has been used," pleaded Mr. Connell.

"That will be easily proved," said the Doctor, promptly. "The signs are so marked that I know what to look for—a terrible drug, sir—simulates natural symptoms so well, that we might have been easily deceived but for the accident of the two cases arising together. Of course, there need be no publicity till after the inquest."

"I must telegraph at once to my son Philip, in London, and bid him prepare that poor, sorrow-stricken household which has reared and sheltered this girl!" said Mr Connell, wringing his hands.

"The Reverend Jasper Toynbee, sir," announced Budd, suddenly coming up at that moment. "He is wanting to see you."

"I am glad he is here!" exclaimed Mr. Connell, as he followed Budd like one in a dream, and saw Cran and another man lingering in the hall. In the luncheon-room he found the strange doctor and Evelyn, and a pleasant-faced clergyman with white hair: the Vicar. Mr. Cran walked up to Evelyn, and said something to her in a low, civil tone.

Evelyn stood up, straight and white. "What is this? What is this all about?" she said, turning to Mr. Toynbee.

"You are suspected of administering this poison," he said in a sad, slow voice.

To his dying day Mr. Connell never forgot Evelyn's face at that moment. He could never describe the change in it. It could not turn whiter or more fixed than it had been before. But there came upon it a look of mingled fear and hope—a something of wild triumph mingled with a strange gleam of something softer. It might be singular, but at that moment of terror and humiliation she drew nearer to his sympathies than ever she had in the heyday of her cold and careless beauty.

"You are not called upon to say anything, remember," Cran spoke, warningly. "It might be used against you afterwards."

"I did not say anything, did I?" she asked, turning upon him. The strange storm-light had died out in her face, leaving it hard and still.

"Nurse Hannah will take charge of you," said Cran; "we can't let you go to your own room. Is there anything you would like?"

"No. Nurse Hannah can be with me: nobody else—none of the people I know."

"Well," said Cran, aside to Mr. Toynbee, "I've never before come across one that didn't think it worth while even to claim innocence. They may know it's no use, but they all think it sounds well."

Evelyn went out with her calm, even step, walking beside the trim female detective. And as she passed him, Mr. Connell noticed on her dress a shred of wool from some little handiwork in which she had been recently engaged. It tore his heart to see it. She too had her harmless human hours!

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE VICAR TAKES THE RESPONSIBILITY OF REPAIRS.

It was Charity Hale who carried Mrs. Raven the news. She was lying on the sofa in her own room.

"There has been dark work, ma'am," said the old woman. "Something queer was going on here for a long time, and it turns out that Nurse Hannah belongs to the police, and she's now got Miss Evelyn under her charge."

"Got Miss Evelyn under her charge?" gasped Mrs. Raven.

"Yes, ma'am," answered Charity. "It's about poisoning—that's what they say was done to Mr. Frank and poor James. I'll not believe she did it, unless she's been made a cat's-paw. There's somebody else behind. What motive could she have?"

"There was that wicked fortune-teller," cried the lady, sitting upright.

Charity gave a low, incredulous laugh. "Do you remember *her*, ma'am? She was in Ravenstoke long before Miss Evelyn came to the Court."

"I believe it must have been the same woman who was in Coltburn during our visit there," said Mrs Raven, excitedly. "But how is Frank?—how is Mr. Frank, Charity?"

"He is doing well, I think, ma'am, but poor James is dead. It is not likely the poison was meant for him. And *I* don't believe Miss Evelyn meant poison for Mr. Frank either. There is nothing wrong lying about that she might have taken hold of by mistake, is there?"——and the old woman peered round, as if she thought that deadly drugs might lie at random in a peaceful chamber.

"No, no, nothing," said Mrs. Raven impatiently. "But that fortune-teller must be found. The police must be told all about her and her sayings—I must tell them myself, if nobody else can."

"I should be very glad to see her, too," cried Charity. "I've a notion that she might tell us something about the two ghosts."

"Did you ever see her yourself?" suddenly asked Mrs. Raven.

"I never went consulting her, ma'am," Charity answered, evasively. "I may have seen her—anybody may see anybody else."

Mrs. Raven rose up. "I have certain—suspicions—which may be worth suggesting—something about an occurrence at Coltburn, too. And when did Mr. Connell come? What made him come, I wonder?"

"He came this afternoon," said Charity. "I suppose, ma'am, it will now be the duty of each of us to tell all that we know and all that we suspect?"

Mrs. Raven replied quietly. "Yes."

"It's my belief that evil will out. I'm afraid it's no use trying to hush it up to save ourselves or to serve others," said the old woman.

"It is no use," returned Mrs. Raven, in the same quiet, slow tone: "and when we strive to hide things, we are only forced to speak about them when it is too late. You can leave me now, Charity."

"There is something deep at the bottom of this affair," the Vicar was saying to Mr. Connell in the drawing-room. "Do you happen to know anything of the past history of this young woman?"

"I know only that she is a foundling, adopted and reared by a very clever and estimable lady," returned the Minister.

"A foundling—adopted?" questioned Mr. Toynbee. "So ho! Somebody told me she was an orphan, brought up by an aunt. Who could that informant have been, now, I wonder? Ah, I recollect

it was Leonard Raven himself, the very last day I saw him before the beginning of his illness. A foundling—adopted, eh? Was she introduced to the Court through your family, sir, may I ask?"

"No; through an advertisement, I believe," answered Mr. Connell. "It is all very sad. And I fear that the very circumstances which should commend this friendless creature—a nameless foundling—to our utmost justice and forbearance, will with most people only serve to condemn her."

"No, no, I hope not," said the Vicar, pacing to and fro meditatively. "Only I had a curious conviction about this girl which would not dovetail with what I had been told about her. And I think it may with what you tell me now."

Mr. Connell sat silent and expectant.

"Did you notice that man in the butler's room?" asked the Vicar, stopping short. "I mean that poor lad's father, the good-looking, dissipated labourer? That's Eldred Sloam? Do you know who he is said to be—is, in fact, known to be?"

"Yes."

"He has been a bad fellow all through," said the Vicar. "He was a bad husband to that poor lad's mother, and he had a vile character before he married her. In his young days there was one girl he got acquainted with for whom everybody was sorry. Her name was Hester Walker. I knew her very well, for she was a favourite servant in a house where I often visited. Nobody knew what became of her, and Eldred fell into a good deal of bad odour over the affair. Some people thought she had made away with herself, and some people seemed to suspect him of making away with her. I didn't—not of that last part."

Mr. Toynbee paused in thought, and then went on.

"The last time I ever saw Hester Walker was one evening when visiting a sick parishioner. I chanced to look out of the window and saw her and Eldred Sloam standing talking at a gate near. He was leaning over it, twirling a flower in his mouth, hard indifference written in every line of his handsome face and figure. She stood in front of him, wringing her hands, and looking up at him as if straining her whole soul to see into his."

"But how do you connect this with Evelyn Agate?"

"Listen," said the Vicar. "The moment I set eyes on Mrs. Raven's new companion, I felt sure I had seen her before, or else somebody very like her. And sometimes by this sort of lurking memory I felt attracted to her, and sometimes repelled. But I could never make it out ——" he paused once more.

"Until ——" prompted Mr. Connell.

"Until one night when Eldred Sloam was ill, and she and Charity Hale came to his cottage while I was there. He was delirious, and in his raving he saw the young lady and was frightened at her."

"Frightened at her," echoed Mr. Connell.

"Yes, he seemed to think she was somebody whom he had injured. He caught hold of her hand, and she, naturally enough, drew back. Sir, at that moment the old scene of the summer evening at the gate rose before my mind, because it seemed repeated before my eyes! Repeated, and yet transposed. The pleading agony of that unhappy girl, Hester Walker, seemed to have entered into Eldred Sloam, and a woman with the features of Hester Walker was spurning him as he had once spurned her! I read my riddle. Evelyn Agate had the face of Hester Walker, but the expression and the hair of this man, Sloam. Think of him, even as you saw him to-day. Can you not see a likeness?"

"It is hard to say whether or no, when one gets a preconceived idea," said Mr. Connell. "But then, if there is anything in your theory, where is Hester Walker herself? And who is she?"

"I think she is Evelyn Agate's mother, wheresoever she may be."

"But, even supposing this to be a fact, I don't see how it bears on the present position of things. It does not supply a motive. If Evelyn Agate be the daughter of this man—even if she knows she is his daughter—how could the death of Frank Raven serve her?"

"It might be malice," mused the Vicar; "a kind of wild revenge for the wrong done to her father by his unfortunate birthright. But I don't set much by that possibility. I'd rather look for some motive nearer hand, perhaps mercenary. Under that strange will of his father's, if Frank should die before his mother, the fortune is at her own disposal. Could the girl hope to ingratiate herself into the vacant place?"

"It is too dreadful to contemplate!" exclaimed Mr. Connell.

"Well, well," said the Vicar, himself recoiling from the picture he had conjured up; "but at any rate this fact of her birth—if it be a fact—would bring her within the range of motives which could not affect an utter stranger. Most crimes have a motive—nay, I believe all have."

"One thing I must do, and that at once," said Mr. Connell: "telegraph to Philip to go to the house of his friend Miss Agate, and break this terrible news to her, and then come down here as quickly as possible. I must telegraph home, too. One never knows how soon the newspapers may get hold of these rumours."

"Could not Mrs. Connell come here to bear Mrs. Raven company?" asked the Vicar, as the two gentlemen walked together down the avenue; "Mrs. Connell, or one of her daughters? Poor Mrs. Raven is in a terrible position—one son hopelessly ill, the other scarcely escaped from the shadow of death, and a favourite companion likely to be arrested on a charge of murder!"

But Mr. Connell shook his head. "My daughter, Louisa, is very ill," he answered; "very weak and ill, and her worst symptoms are nervous ones. Her mother cannot possibly leave her. In fact, we were just on the wing for the Continent, as change is all

that the doctors can suggest for Louisa. Now this horrible story is opened up, I think I had better tell my wife to start off at once, and take our little girls also with her. We had intended to leave them at home in the charge of the governess, Miss Cleare."

"Miss Cleare? That's the young lady who first saw the ghost. I have heard all about that. Shall you take her to the Continent with your family?"

"No," said Mr. Connell promptly, the old instincts of poverty making him remember the expense. Yet he reflected. "Indeed, I can hardly say. You see, all our plans will have to be re-arranged. Mrs. Connell must decide these things."

"Could not you get Miss Cleare to come here?" suggested Mr. Toynbee. "At these times it is always better to have those about us who are in some way associated with our general interests. Besides, Mr. Connell, Miss Cleare *might* be a witness."

"Sir, how much do you know?"

"Nothing but what Frank told me," answered Mr. Toynbee; "it was chiefly about this young lady seeing the figure they call the ghost. He said there was more to be told, and that you knew all.

"There is a great deal more to be told indeed," said Mr. Connell. "We had a fortune-teller down at Coltburn, and the beginning of the trouble was that some of the young people foolishly went to visit her. Then mysterious advertisements appeared in the paper. Then my wife and Miss Cleare saw in our garden a figure exactly resembling that which Miss Cleare had seen in the fields here; and, what has always struck me as oddest and most weird of all, at that very moment a fearful shriek rang through our house, which nobody owned to, and we never could account for. Then Frank, acting on the fortune-teller's instructions, sought in a vase in our drawing-room, and found a sum of fifty pounds in gold, and also a written paper."

"Could that have been put there by this mysterious figure? Could the figure have gained access to your house?"

"No, not then."

"And what was on the written paper?"

"I expect that will have to come out now," said Mr. Connell. "But Frank charged me to keep the secret so sacredly, that I would rather not mention it till I have spoken again with him on the matter."

"Quite so, quite so," assented Mr. Toynbee, eager, as usual, to disclaim all wish to intrude on anybody's confidence. "But this fortune-teller must be found," he went on, as emphatically as Mrs. Raven herself had done.

"My dear sir," said Mr. Connell, "to find this woman has been the main object of the detectives from the outset. She has baffled them hitherto. Did Frank tell you anything about the mysterious delivery to him in her presence of the ring his father used to wear."

"No," said Mr. Toynbee, quickly; "but he mentioned that ring

to me. He told me he had it: that it was safe. It was I who spoke about it first—about Leonard's having said he had lost it. You see all this points to a traitor within the Court."

"Well, well," said Mr. Connell, "but there must be a great deal more that we do not understand at all yet. I shall certainly take your advice, Mr. Toynbee, and get Miss Cleare to come here, if she will. She is a good little girl who has passed through great trials herself, and she knows how to respect sorrow and trouble."

They had reached the railway station, and the Minister went to a desk to compose his telegram. He did not grudge an extra fee, but he wanted every word to tell. As he took the missive to the clerk, he noticed that Mr. Toynbee, who had left him in peace during its composition, had fallen into conversation with a tall, thin, elderly woman. She was talking with the arid fluency of one going over a string of grievances which frequent recital has made familiar.

The Vicar turned towards Mr. Connell as he passed him, but did not speak till he came back—his message safely delivered.

"This is Miss Wilmot, our new post-mistress," he said, and the elderly woman gave a curious cross between the "bow" of her better days, and the "bob" which was the accredited sign of Ravenstoke respect. "Miss Wilmot is again complaining very much of the accommodations of her post-office," the Vicar proceeded to explain, "and not without cause. I promised to speak to your nephews about the necessary alterations—but how can I, just now?"

"And every day I am more and more afraid there'll be an accident," said Miss Wilmot. "It's quite a weight on my mind that something will happen; and the public may suffer, but I shall have to bear the blame. Maybe the gentleman doesn't know my place; but you do, sir, and you can bear witness that it's full of awkward corners, and of rotten floors and skirting-boards which have started that loose that they might serve for bags of letters going nowhere!"

The Vicar drew Mr. Connell aside. "She is a nervous, responsible sort of woman," he said, "and if any accident should happen to throw discredit on her, I should pity her very much. For the post-office is a disgrace to the village. The late Squire was always talking about getting it done up, but the last post-people were very indolent, and never pressed the matter. Don't you think we might ——"

"Give her permission to repair it on our own responsibility," said the quick, practical man. "Yes, certainly."

"I'm sure Frank would like it; and I expect it is Frank with whom the tenants will have to deal very soon."

Mr. Connell answered nothing to that, for he had his own knowledge and his own thoughts upon that matter. But he let the phrase stand.

"Speak to the carpenter yourself, Miss Wilmot," said Mr. Toynbee, briskly, to the post-mistress. "Spur him on to work as fast as he can, and so get your mind at ease."

"Very many thanks, sir, I'm sure," she answered gratefully. "There's no reason why he shouldn't begin to do something this very night, for indeed it's the sooner the better."

Mr. Connell was reflective as they walked back. This was an opportunity for an inquiry which he felt might be instituted with Mr. Toynbee.

"Frank was always a healthy child, I believe?" he said. "Did you know any of the other infants who died?—You were here before Frank's birth?"

"Oh yes," answered Mr. Toynbee; "and I baptized all the others, privately and in great haste—they died so soon—they were so clearly doomed. One died too soon even for that."

"What doctor attended the family in those days?"

"Dr. Wragge; this Dr. Wragge's father. The Wragges have attended the Ravens for two or three generations."

"And I suppose the doctor introduced a nurse?" said Mr. Connell again.

"Yes; always," Mr. Toynbee readily replied. "Not always in time, though. I remember thinking how odd it was that the only healthy baby of the lot came into the world with the least attendance and the least fuss, in a half-unexpected sort of way."

"What! was that Frank?" asked Mr. Connell, breathless.

"Yes," narrated the Vicar. "His birth was attended only by the old woman, Charity Hale—not so old then, of course, as she is now. I think that accounted for her having been always so fond of him, baby, boy, and man. A curious woman, Charity Hale. I'm specially disposed to respect an old family servant, but I can't like this Charity. She's an embittered sort of soul. Perhaps she suffered in her sister's disgrace. It was her sister Salome, you know, who was Eldred Sloam's mother—she died but a day or two before Squire Eldred."

"Does Charity take much interest in her unfortunate relative, Eldred Sloam?" asked the Minister.

"No," said Mr. Toynbee; "she has behaved to him as if she had some severe duty towards him that must perforce be performed. But she was certainly good to the lad who now lies dead yonder. A short, sad life he has had, as had his mother, poor Jane, before him. But I could never altogether pity her. Women have no right to fall in love with such a man as Eldred Sloam."

"I suppose Charity Hale has few connections outside the Court?"

"Old servants generally merge their lives in their masters', and drop their own people," returned Mr. Toynbee. "I think the Hale girls were orphans—perhaps not very carefully brought up, poor things, and that may partly account for Salome's downfall. There was a third sister—younger, I think—who never came near the Court. Charity boasted of this other sister as being an educated lady. What odd tricks our memories play us!" he added, with a half-laugh. "When I have forgotten so much which I have striven hard to retain, why

do I chance to remember the names of those three sisters Hale—only one of whom I ever saw—Salome, Charity, and Isabella? They tickled my fancy somehow. I wondered how their godfathers and godmothers had crossed the Rubicon between old-fashioned 'Bible names' and that of ballad and romance."

As the gentlemen entered the hall, bad news met them. Leonard had had another convulsive seizure without any return to consciousness, or apparent cause for agitation; he now seemed sinking fast, and might not survive the night.

The ministers clung together, as people always do when surrounded by troubles with which they cannot contend. Budd stirred up the fire in the big dining-room, and brought out bottles of good old wine. But though every now and then they tried to divert their conversation to affairs political or ecclesiastical, it would not do. An intense atmosphere of personal tragedy pervaded the place, and pressed upon them. And the only event of the evening was the arrival of Philip's answer to his father's telegram. It ran:

"Will be with you to-morrow morning. Miss Agate cannot leave her brother, but I bring E. A.'s nearest friend, also legal assistance."

CHAPTER XLIV.

A LETTER FROM THE DEAD.

After the fashion of people in times of trouble, Mr. Connell and Mr. Toynbee (who did not leave the Court) sat up far into the night, and were up betimes in the morning. Both were dressing when Budd came knocking at their doors, to tell them that "Mr. Philip Connell and the people from London had arrived." He also acquainted them anew with the position of things. "Mr. Leonard is no better—is as bad as bad can be. But Mr. Frank is going on admirably, and the doctors say there's no more fear for him."

As for the visitors from London, there was a gentleman with a black bag, whom Budd thought he had seen before. Then there was Mr. Philip himself, and there was a poor-looking woman who was crying and seemed frightened. Mrs. Sims busied herself in getting them breakfast."

The two gentlemen had wondered what Philip meant by the phrase of "her nearest friend," as referring to Evelyn Agate. But certainly they were not prepared for what Philip whispered to them, as with a slight gesture he indicated the woman, when all were assembling for business after breakfast.

"This is Evelyn Agate's mother. This new mystery has already unravelled an old one. For more than twenty years this person has acted as Miss Agate's servant," Philip added. "We have known her by the name of Mary Davies."

"And her real name ——" interrupted Mr. Toynbee, eagerly.

"Is Hester Walker. She was once in service near here, and disappeared suddenly. Do you remember the story, sir?"

"Perfectly," said the Vicar. "Mr. Connell knows that I had already discovered a likeness between the lost Hester Walker and this unfortunate girl Evelyn; though there is not much now," he said, with a pitying glance at the scared, suffering face, old before its time.

Mary Davies saw and understood that look. She had known the Vicar, of old. She stepped forward to speak, crying bitterly:

"Oh, sir, save my girl! she can't be guilty. Some bad people must have got hold of her as they got hold of me. I don't say she has not done wrong—it's only when we do wrong that tempters can seize us and drag us farther down. But save her! save her! Oh, sir, such a little help might have saved me!"

In her eager importunity, the unhappy woman had laid her trembling hands on the Vicar's arm. He looked kindly into the convulsed, imploring face. He remembered Hester Walker, and he knew Evelyn Agate. There were far different elements at work in the two —elements which would make their respective temptations absolutely incomprehensible to each other. But he could not say this now, he could only console.

"Your daughter shall have the utmost help and justice, Mrs. Davies. Fear nothing on that score."

"But Mrs. Davies has a story to tell which may explain a great deal to us," observed Philip, drawing chairs round the table. "And we might as well invite in the solicitor I have brought down, before we begin our conversation. There is no harm in his hearing the facts over again. Re-statement often brings out something new. Budd, go and ask Mr. Dewe to step this way. Mr. Dewe," he explained, in an aside to his father and the Vicar, "has been now employed by Miss Agate's wish, and it appears that it is not the first time he has been at Ravenscourt; though I must tell you all about that afterwards. A thoroughly respectable man is Mr. Dewe. Dewe and Creed is one of the first legal firms. This sort of work is not in their usual line."

Mr. Dewe came in. He bowed, and took a seat beside Philip. The Vicar had been talking in a low tone to Mary Davies.

"I can guess Sloam was harsh and cruel to you, poor woman," he said.

"Aye, sir," she answered. "There seemed nobody to turn to in my trouble. And there came always that woman tempting me—saying she would take my baby and get it a good home, and leave me free for honest work. I did what I did for the child's sake."

"But what about that woman?" asked the Vicar. "Who was she? You say she came to you. Where did you first see her?"

"I never knew who she was, sir. I saw her first in Ash Lane.

She met me there one evening when I was hopelessly waiting to see Eldred, and called me into a little shed that stands there, and told me she knew the trouble I was in."

"And you did not know her?"

"No, sir; no. I never heard her name. She wasn't young: she must have been forty—a tall woman, dark, and well-dressed."

Philip touched his father's foot under the table. Evidently he wanted to emphasize this description.

"She gave me money, sir, and bade me go to London to an address she handed me. I was not to mention her to the people of the house, or speak to them of my affairs at all; but she said she was sure to know directly my baby was born, and she would come at once and take it away. She gave me plenty of money. Forgive me, sir, for a wicked woman, but the fancy would keep running in my head that as the lady of the Court was expecting too, and had sickly babies that died, mine might be meant to take the place of hers!"

They were all listening with intense interest.

"But oh, those dreadful days!" wailed poor Mary, "when my little girl was born, and the woman never kept her promise, nor came nigh me!"

"But she did come after all," suggested Mr. Dewe.

"Aye," said Mary, choking back her sobs, "she did come. And she got the child. She did not speak so gracious-like this time. And she bade me go and lodge in a little coffee-house—and I was not to mention her there, either. But she knew the kind of folk that kept it, she said; and if I showed myself a decent woman, they'd get me honest work among their neighbours—and so they did. I did charing for a while, and then I settled down with Miss Gertrude Agate—bless her!"

"And you heard about the calamity in that house, didn't you?" said Philip.

"Aye, sir; I knew that a baby had been taken from their house too, a baby-boy, against their will. But when I opened the door one evening with Miss Agate, through hearing a child cry, and saw the little queen on the steps, I knew it was mine that minute! It came over me at once, like, you see, sir; and when I took her up there was a dear little mole on her neck, that I could have sworn to anywhere. I reckon whoever put her there wished me to know she was mine, for they had pinned on her clothes the date of her birth, just one year before."

"And you kept your secret from Miss Agate?" asked Mr. Connell.

There was a shade of reproach either in his words or his tone, or at least Mary Davies felt it so, for she burst into tears.

"I know I've been a wicked woman," she cried. "I've lived a long lie with the best, most patient angel-lady that breathes in this world. But oh, sir, it was hard on me! I'd found out, well enough, what the world has to say to a woman that doesn't tell where she's

come from, and has no character. And there was Miss Agate crying and laughing over the baby, and saying to it, 'that she might hope her nephew would get the same measure she'd give it.' Was I to drag it out into misery? I knew I ought—but I didn't—and Miss Agate, she knows now, sir, and she forgives me. She never said one bitter word when it all came out last night. Only she said to Mr. Philip Connell, 'Spare nothing to get Evelyn justice first, and then mercy.'"

"God help thee, poor soul!" said the Minister.

"I've been punished," plained poor Mary; "punished sad and sore. Couldn't I always see how my darling child despised poor low people like me? And later she got to hear of Eldred Sloam from Mr. Raven, and she *would* talk about him: 'twas as if some instinct told her he was her father! Then came letters telling Miss Agate that there would be mischief if Evelyn stayed on here. Oh, if the mistress had only heeded me then! But Miss Gertrude would have listened had she known what good right I had to speak."

The gentlemen conferred together. "One cannot help fancying that there may be something in this poor creature's early conjecture that her babe was wanted to be a changeling at the Court," said Mr. Connell. "This puts us on the tract of suspicions already awakened, Philip."

"It does more than that," answered the young man; "for I have more facts than you know yet. Mrs. Raven did not meet with Evelyn so entirely in the common way of advertisement as we think. Mr. Dewe there will tell you of incidents preceding that advertisement; incidents which led up to Mrs. Raven sitting in ambush in his office and getting a sight of Evelyn Agate without the girl's knowledge. These incidents, coupled with all we know, incline me to the belief that there was some dark work on that fourth of September, twenty-two years ago; and what is more, that *Mrs. Raven knows it.* I should have thought that it might be but some plot that was never carried out, but for some recent actions of Mrs. Raven's, which show her to be ill at ease with things as they exist. Who could furnish any particulars of the time when Frank was born, I wonder?"

"We were talking over that last night," said Mr. Connell. "Mr. Toynbee says that at Frank's birth there was nobody with Mrs. Raven but Charity Hale.—Could Charity Hale have been the woman who met Hester Walker?"

"Charity Hale is short, and she limps," said the Vicar. "But what does all this mean? What do you suspect next?"

"That Frank may not be the real child of the Squire and his wife," whispered Philip. "That was what the fortune-teller told him at Coltburn."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Vicar, in sheer dismay.

"Had this servant-woman, Hale, any near relative—any confidante whom she might safely employ?" asked Mr. Dewe in clear business tones. "It is possible we may find some other person with a strong motive for removing this young gentleman, Mr. Frank Raven, out of the way."

"Charity Hale had no friends—scarcely any acquaintances," spoke Mr. Toynbee. "Her sister Salome was long since dead, and her sister Isabella never came to Ravenscourt."

"She had a sister Isabella, then?—'Isabella Hale,'" said the Lawyer.

He wrote the name down on a piece of blotting-paper which lay before him. The pen he used was a quill which had once seen hard usage in the service of the frugal Leonard. The lawyer's handwriting was rather bold and large.

"Could Frank be Miss Agate's lost nephew?" suggested Philip. "But what object could any people have had in grafting the Agate child upon the Raven stem? Yet if we could believe this, much else becomes plain. One can then understand their wish to persuade Frank into marrying this Evelyn, who is at least some remote connection of theirs, and from whose future good offices they might expect something. Who was that cunning fortune-teller, I wonder?"

Mr. Connell started at this abrupt betrayal of poor Frank's honourably-guarded secret. "How do you know that—that—any such thing was proposed to Frank?" he asked. "I'm sure Frank has never told you so. I don't suppose the woman did."

Philip laughed lightly. "I gathered it," he said, "and I got proof positive on that night when he showed you the paper he found in the flower-pot with the hidden gold. You held that behind the candle to read it, and I saw the chief words of the message backwards—thus!" and Philip caught up the sheet of blotting-paper and held it between himself and the window.

At this moment Budd advanced into the room, bearing a letter on a salver. The old servant's face was pale and solemn.

"I'm bidden to give that to you, sir," he said, in awe-struck tones, advancing towards Mr. Connell.

The letter was clean, but old-looking and it bore a postage-stamp, though it was guiltless of post-marks. It was addressed to Frank Raven, at Cambridge.

"I've seen an imitation of this handwriting lately," exclaimed Mr. Connell.

"But this is really the late Squire's," said the Vicar, positively. "I am sure of it. Where does it come from, Budd?"

The lawyer put up his eyeglass, and looked at the three elderly men standing riveted round an ordinary-looking letter—grown awful because in their eyes it was, in very truth, a letter from the dead!

As for Philip, he was so strangely absorbed by the blotting-paper that he noticed nothing; but he suddenly turned about, and broke the hush that had fallen on the room, with an exclamation.

"We have got her! They are one and the same!"

(To be concluded.)

THE CURÉ'S SISTER.

By F. E. M. Notley, Author of "Olive Varcoe."

VI.

THE story Monsieur de St. Erme told me was one of youth, of passion, of sorrow. It was one of those love-affairs, which never could happen in England, and which it is just to say rarely occur among our Continental neighbours. The families of De la Roche and St. Erme, being within three leagues of each other, and having therefore an hereditary feud and jealousy to keep up, suddenly agreed to sink these agreeable feelings in an alliance between the son and daughter of their respective houses. The young people were fiancés, and the old folks being very hot in their new friendship, allowed them to be more together than is usually permitted by French and Belgian etiquette. All was going on as smoothly as haymaking on a sunny day, when the family feud burst forth again with a violence unknown since the Middle Ages, and the intended marriage was instantly broken off, with sarcasm and bitterness on both sides. But, unfortunately, Léon de St. Erme and Clarice de la Roche loved each other. They met secretly, and after much suffering, much debate, and many vain prayers to obdurate parents, the lovers agreed to elope. Now a French elopement in nothing resembles an English one; because it cannot end in marriage without the consent of parents. It is, therefore, undertaken in a species of despair, in order, by the ruin of the girl's reputation, to wring from the irritated relatives their consent to an immediate union. The French marriage law precludes all possibility of marriage without the consent of parents or guardians.

But in this unhappy elopement things did not settle themselves as Lionel de St. Erme had dared to hope. His father and the father of Clarice met, and words became so high and bitter between them, that a duel followed. They crossed the frontier into France, and here Monsieur de la Roche, maddened by the misery of his daughter, shot his antagonist dead. Then hurrying on to Paris, to the address the wretched Clarice had given him, he tore his girl from her lover, and returned home a broken-hearted man.

Léon de St. Erme, in the midst of his anguish, did his best to save Clarice's name, and, strange to say, his family seconded him; and though these efforts were not very successful, yet the secresy and silence of the elopement, were never so completely broken through, as to enable the Belgian Mrs. Grundy to say positively that it had taken place.

The St. Erme family did not prosecute Monsieur de la Roche for the duel; they felt, perhaps, that things were tolerably balanced between

them, and the dishonour beneath which he was sinking, counterpoised the bereavement from which they suffered. Still Madame de St. Erme would not permit the name of De la Roche to be mentioned in her hearing; and Lionel felt that while his mother lived, and while the memory of this duel lived, a marriage between him and Clarice would be impossible. With great difficulty he conveyed to her a heart-breaking letter of farewell, and then, with his widowed mother, he departed for the South of France, where her family resided. All who know the deference and affection given by men of French race to their mothers, will understand the feelings and conduct of Lionel. He could fulfil his duty towards her, while he could do nothing for Clarice save bewail her. It was more than a year before he returned for a short visit to the Château of St. Erme; then his cautious inquiries only elicited the fact that she lived in strict seclusion, as Monsieur and Madame de la Roche had ceased to see any company whatever. But Clarice heard that he was at St. Erme, and one day the Curé, a man already stepping into the vale of years, accosted him, and drew from his pocket a letter.

"I look upon it as my duty to give you this," said the Curé. "I am the confessor of this unhappy young lady, and I make myself the bearer of this, to satisfy her conscience and my own. At some future day you may wish to acknowledge or adopt your child, so you shall not, for her sake, be kept ignorant of its birth."

Overwhelmed with a mingled feeling of pain, joy, and grief, Lionel de St. Erme tore open the letter. It was worded stiffly, for the Curé would not be the bearer of warmer words; nevertheless the deep suffering of the writer broke through the thin disguise, and tears fell on the paper, as the young man read that he had a daughter, of whom the unhappy mother could tell him nothing, except that the infant had been conveyed away in great secresy, and the sole concession her parents had made to her prayer, was to promise that it should be named Léonie.

On receiving this intelligence, Lionel de St. Erme came to the firm resolve that he would one day give his *wife*—as he now termed Clarice in his heart—a legal right to that name, and then he would find his child and acknowledge her.

All the world knows, that England is the only country in the civilised and *Christian* community of nations, which denies to parents the power of expiating the wrong done to their innocent offspring. As in Scotland, so in France, marriage legitimatises children, who in this land would have no name, and no inheritance. And where marriage may be either undesirable or impossible, the French code permits the father to adopt the child, and it thereby becomes legally entitled to his name, and a certain share of his property. Whether this law be merciful and right, since it adds to a state a civilised and useful member, with social status and faculties developed for his own and his country's good; or whether it be more just and moral to fling

human souls into a sea of shame, and bring them up nameless and wretched, ever to be a drag, a brand, and an expense to the land that suffers them, is a question which perhaps in another century or two the wisdom of English legislators will consider.

To return to young St. Erme : anxious as he was to do his duty by his child, his fears, and his love for Clarice, kept him silent and inert. His duty to his mother also interfered. Could he seek an interview with the slayer of his father, or ask his pity or grasp his hand? The idea was too frightful; he felt that his indignation and despair would burst all bonds, and he should break his mother's heart, without hope of altering Clarice's position towards himself. Hence, after vainly striving to convey to her an assurance of his affection, he once more quitted the Ardennes. And perhaps this time as he departed, his bitterest thought was that his child was in the hands of his enemies. Yet, gloomy and reckless as he was, life had not for him the dreary, maddening monotony that it had for Clarice de la Roche. Shut up in an old château, debarred from all companionship, with a mother perishing with ennui, and a father whose soured and broken spirit was a constant reproach to her heart, she longed only to die. But after two years of this life, an escape was offered to her. An old companion-in-arms—a man who had gone through the Russian campaign and the "Hundred Days" by the side of Monsieur de la Roche, paid him a sudden visit. He was sixty years of age, and a widower, with daughters long since married, and a young son born to him late, whose birth had cost his mother's life. To this man, who had been his friend so many years, Monsieur de la Roche confided his grief, and the Comte de Villet pitied him, but pitied Clarice more.

"You speak of putting her in a convent," he said, "give her to me instead, and I will both love her and respect her."

On this proposition being made to Clarice, she declared her willingness to accept it, if she might have her daughter.

"Your child is dead," said her father. He left her without deigning any explanation, and finally it was her mother's tears that prevailed on her to accept the Count de Villet. Madame de la Roche could return to the world with a daughter, who was the Countess de Villet, but never with an unmarried daughter over whose name there was a shadow.

The marriage took place, and not until he was her husband did Clarice understand the chivalry, the delicacy, and tenderness of the man who had given her the shield of his name. "My dear child," he said, "you are twenty, I am sixty. You have gained a father, I a daughter whom the world will call Madame, and respect. In return, I only ask that you will so honour the name I have given you, that during my life you enter into no communication with Monsieur de St. Erme."

Clarice, with tears, promised obedience to this wish. But on hearing of her marriage Léon went to Africa, and for five years those two were as dead to each other; at the end of that period Monsieur de la

Roche died; and then he addressed a letter to her privately, asking after the welfare of his child. She put the letter in her husband's hands, and he replied to Léon shortly but courteously, that the infant was dead. Thus affairs stood for nine years longer, then on her death-bed, Madame de la Roche confessed to her daughter, that the young Léonie lived. She had been placed at a well-known foundling hospital in the Ardennes, and the dying woman drew from beneath her pillow a small locket portfolio, from which she took the ticket which gave the child's number.

"I pinned her name, 'Léonie,' on her bosom," said the Countess; "and a short time since I knew she was living under the care of Farmer Valmine's widow. The Curé of St. Erme can tell you more. I have released him from the seal of confession, and implored him to state to you all he has heard from me of Léonie. Forgive me, Clarice. Now I am going to die I cannot carry out your father's cruel decree, that the existence of this child of the hateful St. Erme's should never be made known to its mother."

Clarice heard this confession with a mingled frenzy of joy, pain, and forgiveness; and, after the Countess's death, she hastened to put herself in communication with the Curé of St. Erme; and through him a letter—giving no names—was placed in Léonie's hands from her unknown mother.

The girl received it coldly. She loved Madame Valmine, she said. She loved her own home, and had no wish to leave it. She had been brought up to work, and did not know how to be a lady.

This answer threw her wretched mother into despair; and she had no one to advise with, for Monsieur de Villet, now very old, was paralysed, and his mind was gone. For a year he lingered thus, then died, and Clarice de Roche in her distress now felt herself free to appeal to her former lover for help and counsel.

All the obstinate hearts, the proud faces that had stood against their union, were dust now; but their young hopes, their young passionate love, was dead also, and there stood between them a gap of eighteen dreary years, which no future time could ever fill up. These years which, if spent together, would have knit their hearts as one—each day, like a link, binding them in mutual memories of joys and sorrows—made now a sorrowful barrier, over which they looked in each other's changed faces, and *philosophised!*

Still, Léon was touched when he found how true to him his old love had been, and the thought of his daughter filled his heart with strange yearnings. He and Clarice married, and this marriage transformed Léonie the foundling, into Mademoiselle de St. Erme, the heiress of that house, and of the still more ancient house of De la Roche.

But during her year of widowhood, as during the year of the Comte de Villet's sickness, Clarice had beaten against Léonie's heart in vain. There was no entrance there for her. The girl obstinately refused to be acknowledged; refused to quit her foster-family, or to accept

any relations but them. That great fear in the French mind—the fear of scandal—had made Madame de St. Erme utter her pleadings secretly, through the Curé of St. Erme, or through letters placed in the shell of the old fountain; but now that she was married, she and her husband were feverishly anxious to claim their daughter.

But to do this by force of law and not of nature, was an idea most painful to the unhappy mother. An appeal to law would rip up all the sorrowful story of her youth, and the decree that gave her her daughter could not give also her daughter's heart. So she came to St. Erme, and in many an interview strove to shake Léonie's resolution, and win her love.

Alas! she beat against a rock.

"I do not care for the luxuries you offer me," said the girl. "To gain them I have to forsake those who have loved me ever since I was born. It is with them I have had a home, with them I have found a mother and a brother. I will not desert them to be rich and a lady; and as for love, *new* love wearies me, it falls upon my heart like an unknown tongue does upon my ear—there is no answer to it in my soul."

"Thus," said the Count to me, "did this strange girl reply to our pleadings; and still unwilling to force her to come to our roof by a legal process, I thought of trying how the offer of a rich alliance would affect her. I spoke to her of the young Comte de Villet, who had seen and admired her. She listened to me at first in passionate contempt—a contempt which has changed lately to a fixed eagerness."

"And will she marry him?" I cried.

"I think so," returned the Count. "Her mother, who is much attached to young De Villet, is most anxious for this alliance. And though I will not hurt her maternal love by saying so, I believe it is Léonie's attachment to him which has at last brought her to our arms."

I mused a moment in silence, not daring to utter what I thought; then I asked if the Comte de Villet loved Léonie.

Monsieur de St. Erme sighed deeply.

"I scarcely know," he said. "Remember the difference between Léonie's rearing and his; how can he have any sympathy with one brought up without any of the refinements of birth, education, and wealth?"

"But Léonie has genius," I answered; "and genius is above the accidents of birth and fortune."

"Yes," sighed the Count; "it may be so; nevertheless, it takes a great soul to recognise genius, and I fear my son-in-law elect sees only that Léonie is the heiress to the lands of St. Erme and De la Roche."

I went home musingly, stricken with sad forebodings.

VII.

"I THOUGHT she would have told us herself," said the Curé. "I would never have believed that Léonie would have left it to another to tell us such a tale as this."

"And how could she go without a leave-taking?" cried Madame Valmine, weeping. "Gabriel and I have always loved her so dearly! Surely it is bitter to part without a word. The mother who was ashamed of her, the noble friends who forsook her, will never love her as we do."

I had my own thoughts, but I buried them in pitiful silence, and a thousand pleadings should not have torn them from my soul. So I let them blame Léonie, and I did *not* say: "The girl has done this for your sake, and her heart is breaking."

The Curé was very pale, and his eyes, as he looked at me, were full of keen reproach.

"Is this Léonie's own doing?" he asked. "I fancied her heart was generous and noble. I did not think that hers was a spirit to be blinded by sudden wealth. Alas! for the deceitfulness of riches!"

He turned away his head to hide from me his emotion, but I saw the quiver of his lip, and the shadow of pain on his brow.

"Can the love of so many years be forgotten in a day?" cried Madame Valmine, wringing her hands passionately. "Can a child be so ungrateful? Oh, Léonie! Léonie!"

I was roused now into taking her part

"Why do you *both* mistake her?" I said, angrily. "She loves you—she is dying of grief—she leaves you only for the sake of a holy duty. Do you know that her mother—her *own* mother, has knocked in vain at the door of her heart, these two years past? And she has borne her anguish in bitter silence, never grieving you by a word. Which would she have chosen if she could?—this poor cottage, or yon stately château? Remember that for two years, of her own free choice, she has stayed beneath this lowly roof, brightening it with her presence, when she should have gladdened her mother's home. Whose tears has she wiped away?—yours or hers? For whom has she spun and toiled? For whom has she sung and smiled? Was it not for you, and not for that sorrowful, lonely lady yonder, who would have given all her wealth for one of her child's smiles and kisses—lavished daily upon you?"

"True, true," said the Curé. "Mother, we are wrong; we are unreasonable. Léonie does but her duty in obeying her parents."

"But without a farewell," sobbed Madame Valmine. "Why leave me without a farewell? I could bear the parting, if she had fallen on my neck and kissed me before she went."

"And had she not a reason?" I cried, warmly. "Can you not believe, that she who has been generous all her life long is most generous now, when she leaves you abruptly without a word or a kiss? I tell

you she is in the straight and thorny path; and may God comfort her in it! May some angel take her by the hand, and lead her away from her own despair."

I erred in saying so much, and I repented as I saw the surprise on Madame Valmine's honest face, and the startled look in the good Curé's eyes.

"Not despair!" he said gently. "They will let her see us often; we shall not be parted."

How could I tell him that Léonie meant never to see his face again? I was silent.

"No," he continued, "the parting is but nominal: we shall meet so often. And when Léonie gets used to her new position she will be happy. You too, mother, will be proud to see her a great lady; you will be pleased when this little child of your adoption comes to you in jewels and silks, and calls you mother. For she will do this always. Ah! I feel Léonie is unchanged in heart."

I believe he said this partly to sooth his mother, and partly to cheat himself with a fair dream, which he knew could never come to pass.

The foundling Léonie was their own—their very own—but Mademoiselle de St. Erme could never belong to them again. Nevertheless, I would not utter even a sigh to check their visions; and as they grew in brightness, Madame Valmine's sorrow diminished, till at last she broke into smiles and joyful anticipations for the future.

When I left them, late in the evening, they were still full of wonder, and I had not said a word about the coming marriage!

"I cannot do it," I said to myself, as I walked homewards. "Let him hear it from other lips. I, who have seen Léonie's anguish, dread now the sight of a tortured heart."

When the day came for my dinner at the château, I confess I rode thither with feelings of intense curiosity, being most anxious to see how Léonie bore this great change in her position, and the terrible parting that had so shaken her soul.

She was sitting alone when I entered the drawing-room, and I was startled to see the girl's face. It was white as snow, save for the dark veins round the eyes, which showed she had wept much. She was robed in white, her black hair being beautifully wreathed with pearls, but these and the whiteness of her dress, did but increase her paleness. Moreover, unlike a heroine of romance, Léonie looked ill at ease in her rich toilette; and graceful as was her shape naturally, the unaccustomed apparel took from it her native charm, without giving her the acquired elegance of fashion.

She held her hand towards me, with a wistful smile.

"Say nothing to me of *them*," she murmured, "or my courage will fail."

I obeyed her, and throughout that stately dinner no one would have guessed from Léonie's manner that her heart was a very volcano, in which lay a fire terrible and withering in its strength.

At the dessert, Monsieur de St. Erme, in a few graceful words, alluded to the approaching marriage between the young Count and his daughter, and he then invited all the guests to a ball to be given that day fortnight, when the marriage contract would be signed. The fashion was then just beginning to hold the ball on this occasion, rather than on the wedding-day, which had ever been the custom till lately. The marriage, the Count told us, would take place on the morning after the ball, and many of the guests would therefore remain that night at the château. I was among those to whom this hospitality was offered.

Léonie never blushed or faltered as her marriage was spoken of; and though on her pale cheeks there now glowed a spot of burning red, it was more like the hectic of pain than the flush of joy. I watched the young Count, and saw that, if once indifferent to his bride, he was no longer so now. Evidently during the week he had spent in Léonie's society, she had roused his interest and curiosity, and planted in his heart the germ of a true affection. The subtle power of her genius and her passion had awoke the fire of his own soul, and he was ready to become her slave if she would. She did not see it, she did not know it. Simple, and unconscious, she ever seemed unaware of the might of that attraction which, like a charmed circle, drew towards her all those who came within the magnetism of her presence.

Late in the evening, Madame de St. Erme found an opportunity to speak to me unheard by the crowd. Unlike a great lady, she was nervous and excited.

"Léonie is new to all this," she said; "how do you think she bears it?"

"Quietly," I answered.

"Ah, yes, too quietly! She is always as you see her now, a statue of stone. There is something unnatural in this extreme calm in a young girl."

And are you too deceived, I thought, by this peace of the earthquake and the hurricane? How strange that this girl, who makes every one *feel* her passion and her strength, can yet force them to deny it, and believe her calm!

"I doubt if Léonie is not greatly troubled in spirit," I said. "Her calm is only outward."

"I think not," replied Madame de St. Erme. "You know with what reluctance she came to me, with what seeming grief she quitted her foster-family. Well—will you believe it?—she has not asked for them since, and although I have been to see them so often, she has each time refused to accompany me. Can she be cold-hearted?"

I could have smiled at the question, but I was too sorrowful. I felt like one who walks amid a smouldering fire, which may burst forth and overwhelm him.

"Do not think her cold," I said, earnestly, "lest you fall into some error which may grieve you."

"Alas! she is cold to me! I shall never win her love," said Madame.

"Have patience," I answered. "Can she root up old affections in a week?"

"You ever strive to comfort me," returned the lady, gratefully. "But you see, I am losing my jealousy of her foster-mother, and I am even disappointed that she has grown indifferent so soon. I dread to see her new wealth develop hardness or ingratitude in her character."

"Does Madame Valmine think her ungrateful?" I asked.

"I fear so. And although I have sent her flowers and fruit every day in Léonie's name, and although I have made for her every possible excuse, I can see both she and the Curé are deeply hurt at her persistent absence. The poor woman wept yesterday, and flung the gift I brought her to the ground. 'I want none of your gifts,' she said, 'I want a sight of Léonie's face, a loving word from her lips—it is for this I pine. We are very sad here, Madame—my son and I; you have taken from us the light of our home. Léonie was my daughter and Gabriel's sister for twenty years.'

"Her words smote me to the heart," continued Madame de St. Erme; "and I promised Léonie should come to see her to-day; but I promised vainly. 'I cannot go,' she said to me in her quiet way. 'I can never see their faces again.'"

"They know of the coming marriage?" said I, anxiously.

"Yes," she answered; "I told them of it yesterday."

"And what did they say?" I cried.

"Madame Valmine sent Léonie her blessing, but her son said nothing. He seems a reserved and silent man, that young Curé," observed Madame.

I held my peace, half in sorrow, half in fear. And soon after this I took my leave, uttering no word to Léonie that could disturb the coldness of her aspect.

VIII.

All the village talk was of the grand wedding at the château. "Think of our little Léonie being Madame la Comtesse," said the peasants. "It's like a fairy tale. How happy she will be! And he is handsome as the day, that young Count. The wedding will be the grandest fête ever seen!" Thus the spectators talked, while the actors in the drama hid their aching hearts beneath their tinsel of rank and wealth.

I was at the Curé's house on the night before the great day. Madame Valmine was tearful and excited, the Curé calm and quiet.

"I am to go to the château to-morrow," said Madame Valmine.

"The Countess sends a carriage for me. Ah! she is goodness itself. I cannot believe it is her fault that Léonie is so cruel."

"Mademoiselle de St. Erme is right in not returning to this house," observed the Curé. "She understands her position too well; she perceives the truth, that we are parted for ever. It will but grieve her to see you to-morrow, mother."

"How can you talk thus of your sister?" exclaimed Madame Valmine.

A slight flush rose to the Curé's brow. "I cannot call myself the brother of Mademoiselle de St. Erme," he said. "Léonie the foundling, might be my sister, but not the Countess de Villet."

As I listened to him I wondered; and yet I ought not to have marvelled at the sorrowful peace about the man; for he had that in his face, which showed he had wrestled in prayer and fasting, and the drop of gall that had rankled in his heart, was wrung out.

"Do you go with your mother to-morrow?" I asked him, laying my hand upon his shoulder.

"Do you not know," he answered, "that a priest is never invited to a wedding?"

There was something in his mournful voice that rang through my very soul. I had forgotten that I was speaking to a priest—a man cut off from fellowship with human ties—and I felt angry with myself for my blunder.

"Ah! forgive me," I said, seizing his hand. "How I wish you were a Protestant." As I spoke, a whole romance flitted before me, and I beheld happiness where now I saw despair.

But the Curé flushed angrily. "Of what are you talking?" he said, hastily. "Heresy has no charm for me."

Ashamed of my second blunder, I faltered forth some excuse, and then turned to listen to Madame Valmine's long description of Léonie's trousseau.

Going homewards that night, as the clock chimed eleven, there passed me, in the darkness, like the face of a troubled spirit, the white face of Léonie de St. Erme. Her eyes wildly distended, were fixed with such haggard woe on the light in the window of her cottage-home, that she neither heard nor saw my quiet figure. So I turned silently and watched her. With head bent forward, in eager longing, she walked on hurriedly, till she reached the shadow of a high wall, just opposite the cottage. Here she rested, and with her eyes fixed upon her home, she stood like a statue, till the light in the little window died out. Only once she moved, shrinking against the wall, and hiding her face in her dark mantle; this was when Gabriel Valmine stood for a moment, at his window, looking upwards, like a man who prays. When all was silent, and the house quite dark, Léonie crept forward, and, kneeling down, she pressed her lips on the threshold of the door. From my ambush where I stood, I heard her stifled sobs, and, had I been a woman, I would have wept also.

It was nearly midnight when the girl arose, and stole away like a shadow.

I looked after her wistfully, but I would not follow her, or offer her my protection.

"She came hither safely," I said; "she will return safely. God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb."

Poor Léonie! she came through night and darkness to pray for them, and to kiss the threshold of their door, and her foster-mother thought her cruel!

The marriage contract, which gave the young pair a noble dowry, lay on the table in the great hall. The Comte de Villet, with a flush of youthful joy on his cheek, signed first, then the Count de St. Erme led his daughter to the table, and her bridegroom, with an eager look in his eyes, handed her the pen. It was at this instant I scanned Léonie, with an anxious glance, and felt re-assured. I had never seen her more calm, or more beautiful. Her bridal attire of pure white, her wreath of orange flowers and wild white rose, her long veil of snowy lace, suited her strange style of beauty, and I thought for a moment I saw before me a sibyl, a vestal, or a priestess of some wild, dead faith.

She took the pen with an unfaltering hand, and, raising her large dark eyes to her father's face, she smiled. Oh, how I blessed her for that smile, which lifted from my heart a cloud of fear and sorrow!

Another instant, and her firm signature was affixed to the document, which pledged her to be the young Count's wife. As her fingers dropped the pen, I saw a quivering paleness gather about her lips, and I felt in my own heart the shadow of the pang in hers. But she conquered, and turned her face, with that same smile on it, towards her father, and received his kiss. Then her mother's lips touched hers, and Madame de St. Erme, with a look of ineffable joy, lifted her tearful eyes to heaven as if in praise. Next came the bridegroom, and, as he stooped and saluted his bride on either cheek, that paleness about her lips grew ashy white, and, as her eyes drooped, I saw tears gather on the lashes. A crowd came round her now, and hid her from my sight, and just at this instant, Madame de St. Erme's trembling hand touched my arm.

"I have prepared a happy surprise for Léonie, to-day," she whispered to me. "I have reason to think that she refused to see Madame Valmine for fear of wounding me, so I have sent for her foster-mother, and I mean to give her at table, the place of honour, next the bride.

I had no time to say that I thought this would be a dangerous trial for Léonie, for the company, sweeping on towards the doorway, separated me from the Countess. The throng pressed on to the grand saloon, where a sort of daïs was erected, on which stood two fauteuils,

for the bride and bridegroom. Here they were to sit to receive the congratulations of the guests, and Léonie, still calm and stately, took her seat, so unmoved, that I could scarcely believe that this was the same girl, whose wild, white face had passed me in the night, like a vision.

But now the crowd moved suddenly to right and left, and I saw Madame Valmine leaning on the arm of Madame de St. Erme, and I heard the latter's voice, saying softly :

"Léonie, *both* your mothers are here to-day to give you their blessing."

What passed next was like a dream, a flash of some strange vision instantly withdrawn : for I saw Léonie dash down the steps of the daïs, and with a loud cry fall at Madame Valmine's feet.

"Take me home !" she shrieked wildly, "I cannot bear this gilded misery. Mother ! mother ! I feel I am going mad !"

The scene of confusion that ensued was indescribable. Madame de St. Erme fainted, and was carried out, with a look on her dead white face, that haunted me for years.

But oh, the wild, wild woe in Léonie's eyes, as, dragging her foster-mother with her up the daïs, her face rose before me like the face of despair I had seen flitting by in the starlight, when it stooped to kiss the threshold of Gabriel Valmine's door.

"Why have you come hither, mother ?" she cried, with her arms on high. "I was doing my duty, I was acting my part bravely ; now you have smitten me again to the dust." Then giving way to the passionate impulses of her nature, she flung herself on her knees, and with her bridal veil trailing on the ground, and her cheeks tear-stained, she stretched out her arms towards her father and her pale bridegroom. "Forgive me," she said, "I am but a poor peasant-girl ; you may call me Countess, and deck me in satin and pearls, but I tell you,"—and her voice rose, and she laid her hand upon her heart—"the peasant-girl is *here*, and here too is her love, her love for those—O God, forgive me ! what am I saying ? Pardon me, father, I will do all you wish. Take her away ;—take his mother out of my sight, lest I die of grief. Monsieur de Villet, if you will have a sorrowful woman for your wife—a poor, unlettered girl, who will always be a peasant at heart, and whose very soul is on fire beneath the scorching of a great sin, then I am yours, and I will try to make you a good wife. And may the saints and the Holy Virgin help me !" Poor Léonie ! poor untaught, foolish Léonie ! she spoke from her heart, and she thought to touch theirs, being ignorant that fashion shapes her votaries into fishes, all dumb, all of one shape and pattern, and any cry coming from the soul is hated, and branded as a scene.

Ashamed and angry, the young Count turned away his crimsoned face from the prayerful eyes of Léonie, and stooping, he whispered to Monsieur de St. Erme, "Get that ridiculous peasant-woman out of the way ! It is she who has done this."

But Léonie's father answered him with only a troubled look, and descending among the crowd himself, the bridegroom seized the weeping Madame Valmine roughly by the arm, and led her to the door, uttering in her ear rapid words of scorn and anger. With straining eyes Léonie watched this scene, her senses seemingly bewildered by a strange horror, but as her frightened foster-mother, at the doorway, looked back upon her reproachfully, she dashed forward, parting the crowd on either side by her vehemence, and reaching her, she clasped her in her arms and kissed her.

"You see," she said, bitterly, "you have no part in me now; we are separated for ever. But kiss me, and bless me, before you go, mother."

But Madame Valmine was crazed with vexation, shame, and disappointment, so she answered angrily:

"You want no blessing of mine, Mademoiselle. I wish you joy of your fine jewels and clothes, and your fine husband the Count."

"See this woman off the premises!" cried the exasperated bridegroom to his servants. "This insolence is past bearing."

Two men laid their hands on Madame Valmine, and pushed her through the great doors of the hall. It was an act done in anger—done in a moment, but it broke Léonie's heart, and its consequence went on into eternity.

Hard as turning of Madame Valmine from the door might be, it yet seemed a measure of necessity, and all breathed more freely when she was gone. All but Léonie, and she stood like a statue of stone, with eyes dilated and hands clasped upon her brow. Then, as the Count de Villet turned with profuse apologies to his guests, I drew near to her and touched her on the arm. "Léonie," I whispered, "remember your promise to me at the fountain. A worse sorrow than this might fall on your foster-mother through you. For her sake you must bear this."

Such a look as Medea had when she slew her children, Léonie turned on me, and my blood coursed to my heart like a river, as I bent to hear her words.

"I take heaven and you to witness," said Léonie, "that when they thrust my mother forth, I would have gone with her hand-in-hand, and I would have sprinkled the dust from my feet as I left this place; but I know there is a curse upon me, and I dare not bring its blight upon her and hers. No, I could not follow her to-day—their home can never be my home again; but you, who know the truth, will say for me, that for their sakes I forsake them. Oh, I have courage to save her and him—believe me. You shall see I have!"

Her face shone as she spoke, like the face of one of those women of old, who have died from some noble mistake of duty; and walking rapidly through the parting crowd, she mounted the dais where her father still stood, and taking his hand she kissed it. "Father," she said, wistfully, "do not grieve for my roughness and my faults; you

shall see the noble blood is in me, hidden though it be by my peasant culture."

In all his life, I doubt if the Count had ever sorrowed for the passion and the disobedience of his youth as he did now. But his tongue faltered, and he could not speak, as he held his child tightly by her small hand, and gazed into her face.

"Friends," said Léonie, in that wonderfully clear voice of hers; "You know my history, and knowing it you will pardon me, that unlike a lady—for I am not taught like you—I gave way to my own feelings to-day instead of considering yours. Forgive me! I know so little. My world has been so small, that until lately my heart has held all my universe."

She curtsied low, and clung to her father with both hands, overcome with a sudden timidity, being startled, as it were, by her own courage in speaking. Her apology was so humble, her manner and appearance so graceful, yet so unlike the conventional pattern to which the world is used, that all were charmed by the very singularity of her wild outburst and gentle defence; and, had fashion allowed it, all hands would have clapped her, as her clear accents ceased. The young Count's wounded vanity was smoothed again, and he cried out cheerfully:

"Let us begin the ball! I will go and fetch my mother."

When Madame de St. Erme re-appeared, her eyes were swelled and reddened; but seeing her daughter so calm again, she rallied, and the ball passed off with fitting spirit.

Never was Léonie so attentive to her mother as on this night; but I observed that when the dance with the bridegroom, which etiquette required, was over, she avoided him, and her face paled even at the sound of his voice.

Balls are early in the Ardennes, and it was not much past midnight when the carriages drove away, leaving in the château myself and a few other guests, who were to be present next morning at the marriage ceremony.

Léonie went to rest early. Her mother's arm was round her, and they both smiled.

"Good night," said Madame.

"Farewell!" said Léonie, and putting out her hand, she touched mine, and I found a note in my palm. Looking at it, when alone in my room, I read on the envelope, "Do not open this until to-morrow, when I am gone."

"It is some message for *them*, to be given when she has departed with her husband," I said to myself; and, respecting her wish, I placed the letter in my pocket-book.

IX.

WHAT was it awoke me in the morning? It was a sense of suffocation—a great horror—a feeling like the touch of a dead hand upon my face—and, starting up, I trembled, asking myself what had

happened. But beyond the distant sound of servants busy with their work, all in the château was still; so flinging off the chill that lay upon me, I dressed, and sauntered into the garden. I went down to the fountain, and thought how strangely fitting an emblem it was of Léonie's withered life, and Madame de St. Erme's barren and wasted youth. But as I mused, a piercing shriek rose up to the morning sky, and filled with terror at the sound, I rushed back to the house.

I met haggard faces and cries of woe on every side.

"She is dead! She is dead!" they whispered to each other.

Scarcely knowing what I did, I followed the throng, and found myself at the threshold of Léonie's chamber. The door had been burst open, and the fumes of charcoal filled the air.

Léonie lay on her bed, dressed as I had seen her the night before, but she was dead, and the white veil and wreath above her pale face, looked a ghastly mockery.

Madame de St. Erme knelt by the bedside, convulsed with grief, the Count and her stepson leaning over her. The bridegroom's face was white as his dead bride's, but he uttered no word either of sorrow or of comfort; so not a sound broke the stillness of death in that chamber, save the low sobs of women.

A pan of charcoal, still glowing with white heat, stood on the closed stove. There was no need to ask questions; this told me all. And, sick at heart, I went back to my room and read Léonie's letter.

"Dear Friend,—You have known me three years, and you, and you only, have guessed my secret. You are a Protestant. To you it will not seem so terrible, so wicked, that I, who know all his goodness, should love him. In your eyes my sin is not sacrilege, not past repentance, as it would seem, to *him* and to his mother; therefore it is, that I do not shrink from letting you see this blot in my soul. But spare me in their memory; do not let them pluck me out of their hearts, as one who lived among them as a leper, hiding her leprosy. Through what anguish and bitterness I have hidden my wicked love from their sight, my own soul alone can say. But I was very content, very happy as his sister; no thought that I loved him better than a sister startled me, till my real mother told me of my birth. Then I felt more clearly that I was not his sister, and foreseeing that we should be separated by a thousand barriers that rank and wealth make, I endured such torture, that my heart awoke to the truth. To be parted for ever; to see his face no more; to be neither sister nor friend to him, but a stranger; this is what the future offered me, and I rebelled against it. I clung to my cottage home, as we cling to life. But all things were a torture to me now. Oh, if my mother had left me in blindness, I should have lived on peacefully as his sister to the end; but now that I *knew* the terrible secret of my own heart, I was ever at war with myself. At last I felt that I ought to spare them the sorrow of my presence, and about this time, my father offered me a noble

husband—a man whom once my wildest dreams would not have fixed on, and in this I thought I saw a means offered me by heaven to save them from my grief. You strengthened me in this thought, and I thank you for it.

"I believed I could marry the Count, and live for him and my parents; but I cannot—I cannot. My whole soul rises against him in terror and loathing, when I tell myself I am his wife. Yet, until to-day, my courage never failed me; but to-day I saw him strike my mother—Gabriel's mother—and I feel I would choose strangling rather than clasp his hand. A good man I might have learned to love, but a mean and cruel heart I despise. So I choose death, because there is no other way now to escape. With the sound of the music in my ears, I have thought and thought, till my brain seemed on fire, and I saw no way of flight but this—no refuge but the grave.

"Ask them to forgive me—my father and mother, I mean. I would have lived for them if I could; but it is better to die than to sin; it is better to die than to live in despair and hatred.

"Let the true secret of my sorrow die with me, so there may be no shame—no pain in the tears which my foster-mother and brother will shed upon the grave of Léonie. Yet tell him to pray for me—to pray for me always while he lives.

"I have written a line of farewell to my mother and father, so no necessity will be laid on you to speak of this letter to them. Oh, have pity on me, and do not betray to their contempt and loathing the tortured heart of

"Leonie de St. Erme."

It was too late to be angry with the careless security, which had made me leave this letter unopened, but it was not too late to respect the wishes of a broken heart.

I kept her secret.

Poor Léonie! I had not, as she imagined, guessed it, till the meaning of her own incoherent words at the fountain came to my mind, after I had left her at the château.

Gabriel Valmine was present at her funeral, and I know it was his hand, which sowed for many years on her grave, in the little blue flowers she loved, her name—Léonie.

I gave him her message.

"I should have prayed for her without it," he answered, softly. And I know he fulfilled his word, for a year afterwards I saw written on many pages of his mass-book and his psaltery the words "Pray for Léonie!"

In the cemetery of that little village in the Ardennes, where Gabriel Valmine was Curé, the pious priest now lies at rest, and on his tombstone there is carved neither his name, his age, nor his virtues, but those same simple words:

"Pray for Léonie!"

A PARSON'S FLITTING.

By C. J. Langston.

THAT "three removals are as bad as a fire" is a proverb preserved by its truth; for who can adequately estimate the anxiety, the discomfort and the loss which a removal entails. I have often watched with sad interest the autumnal flitting of humble parishioners; and, as George the Third wondered, good man, how the apple ever got inside the dumpling, I have also innocently wondered how the numerous articles spread over a four-roomed cottage could possibly get in the homely waggon, a space of about four feet by twelve. There may be a touch of the humorous in the shifts and contrivances resorted to on these occasions, but as George Grossmith used to say, "although we laugh heartily when we see a man running after his hat, no man cares to laugh when running after his own hat," and one's remembrance of a removal is rather serious than comical. I was beset with circulars from gentlemen who make it their business, probably from purely philanthropic motives, to assist mankind during the misery of removal. Each could say with confidence that he had the largest vans, the newest appliances, the ablest men, the most excellent testimonials. Embarrassed, like the famous Miss Kilmansegg, by so many eager suitors, perhaps, like that luckless lady I chose the——However, I will not anticipate.

The man of my choice had long been accustomed to remove everyone everywhere; and articles of any bulk, from a pincushion to an elephant. Dangerous seas and rocks ahead were no impedimenta; and as to the intricacy of Bradshaw, and the obduracy of railway companies, every line was at his finger ends, and each company vied in its endeavour to secure his patronage. Being in so large a way of business, the contents of my humble house were a mere bagatelle; how much accommodation would be required was seen at a glance; and all other arrangements were concluded in a few minutes.

Fortunately I was allowed to prepare and pack all but the glass and the books. Having so far settled matters I was free for a month: free to discharge those paper pellets at society's hall door enjoined on such occasions: and to share that profuse hospitality which contrasts so favourably with present solitude. I had no idea that I had taken such deep root in Kentish soil. If the cynical Byron declared that even in leaving the most unpleasant people "we cannot help looking at the steeple;" how fondly did I gaze at that picturesque steeple attached to the church where I had ministered during the best years of manhood. It is true that the parish had changed, and all for the worse, since that bright summer morning when the great tenor bell proclaimed a new rector: a change not unlike that of life's early

morning compared with the solemn shadows of sunset. Driven away by harsh exaction, and deep depression in agriculture, the chief people had gone; and the race of quiet, earnest labourers, alike respectful and respected, had given place to migratory individuals to whom Sunday appeared the same blessed day of rest as it did to the Sussex farmer when "he sat on his *cheer*, put his feet on the hob, and thought of nothing." The interesting old people too had died, and among them one especially dear unto me. Altered days had indeed brought altered ways, and I felt that my work had been done.

Yet it was a hard task to say good-bye to those who had been with me during my ministry; those whom I had long attended in sickness and in health, those whom I had watched from childhood to maturity.

Harder still was it to bid adieu to the venerable church, which, with such care I had restored to pristine beauty and dignity. It was nearly dusk when I entered by the low southern door, probably for the last time. Deep shadows had crept down from the lofty belfry; and a stray bird, like the spirit of de Criol entombed below for four hundred years, was flapping against the windows, seeking eagerly for release. Reading once again on the marble tablet a name I knew so well, I thought: Could they come back to me, these old familiar faces, as in the happier time, the congregation of the dead would be greater than that of the living. And those also whose troth was plighted, and whose hands I had joined together near the Lord's table, could *they* come back with the attendant train of happy faces, where would be the sunshine and the smile? Ah! it is well that we turn over but one leaf of human history at a time.

Out in the quiet churchyard where the keen March wind is hurrying past the graves, and moaning in the great yews whose wide arms are waving gentle adieus to him who loved them well. Stop! there is Master Willes's grave; he who wound up his threescore years and ten on the spot which I am leaving. Sexton, clerk, and parish officer; a quaint, old-world figure in gaberdine and knee-caps, who once knew well the safest creek to land a cargo; and whose treasure was stored away so carefully, that folks think it is still hidden like that of Captain Kidd. Here, in this secluded churchyard he laid down the burthen of fourscore years. A little more hurrying to and fro, thought I; a little more agitation of that precious pulp called brain, and I wonder where will be the end.

I was a trifle disappointed when the furniture vans came, several hours after they were due. "The largest vans in the kingdom, with the newest appliances, direct from London," had considerably shrunk on the way I thought, as the stunted wheels grated on the neat gravel; followed by several rapscallions as helpers from the adjoining town. The vans looked as if they had been discarded from Wombwell's Menagerie; and were weather-beaten from prolonged quarantine in a country lane. How was the ordinary furniture of a ten-roomed house

to be pressed into space so small? I must admit that I trembled for articles hitherto without scratch or blemish: spacious solid articles too, that will not yield to compression, or be coaxed into corners half their size. Fortunately, I had packed pictures, wine, and nearly everything requiring care, in square cases that would have borne even a railway porter's handling without injury: but I had been particularly requested to leave the crockery and books to "able men of long experience." Reader! if you are inclined on a similar occasion to submit to this arrangement, believing it to be economical, all I can say is: Don't!

As the able men came unprovided with material to wrap round the fragile articles, my good man-servant was employed for hours in collecting musty hay and fragmentary paper. With respect to my unfortunate books, which I hoped to see secured with exemplary care, the professional idea was both simple and original, and fully bore out the words of the circular, "no packing needed." The moveable open book-cases, having been lightened sufficiently to be lifted, were carried to the van doors and then tilted forwards; the scattered volumes being left to arrange themselves in such interstices as could be found.

The stray helpers, I need hardly say, were new to the business. They thought nothing of walking over bedding in hob-nailed boots; or turning cases of preserves topsy-turvy; and showed a remarkable aptitude in cannoning with heavy furniture against painted doorposts and expensive paper. In fact the walls of the staircase looked as if an enraged cat had been drawn along them backwards. To remonstrate with the regular men, who related (of course, incidentally) that they had started without breakfast at four o'clock in the morning, and were a little uncertain as to whether they should have any dinner, would have been cruel; but as the collection of articles increased round the last van, and the space within became less, I turned away to avoid noticing the inevitable strain and squeeze which must follow. When no more furniture could be induced to enter, I had the pleasure of seeing the drawing-room suite placed unprotected on the roof, and it needed but an old kettle slung with the other goods at the back, to complete the resemblance to a travelling "Cheap Jack." What if a heavy shower should descend upon the green velvet coverings, and patter upon the gilded mirrors? I trembled to think of it.

Who does not remember the last night in the old home? The naked walls, the squares of clean paper fringed with cobwebs where familiar pictures have hung; the sounding floors; the yawning grates, where the soot already begins to fall, shaken down by the recent clatter overhead; the mute appeal of the dismantled rooms to old association. The cheerful gatherings, the guests who have come and gone; the greetings and the partings, from some, alas! who will never greet us more; the pleasant times when the morning sun awoke us, and sunshine within warmed and braced us for our work; the sad times and weary when the doctor was at the door, and the chain of life dragged heavily; and we thought it were better not to be. And then the

solemn remembrance that so much of life has been done with; so many scenes in this "strange, eventful history" played out; and we ourselves so changed from what we were.

I was alone in the empty house. The furniture was miles away; the servants had beds elsewhere, and a humble neighbour had kindly provided a few things to enable me to pass the night. No wonder the heathen philosopher was perplexed at beholding the number of articles he did *not* want. A travelling trunk for a table; a stable bucket for a seat; the neck of a bottle to fix the candle, and a walking-stick to poke the fire. What needed I more for the sitting-room? and the bed-room furniture was also primitive. The worry and excitement of the day were over, and the strange feeling succeeded of lying down to rest in one's own house for the last time. To pass freely in and out of the front door one day; and to know that on the next there would be the formality of knock and ring, and no admittance except on business. To walk once more about the pleasant gardens; to look at the budding trees and shrubs, many of which I had planted and watched with increasing interest. To remember that a stranger would know nothing of incidents which made them doubly dear to me; blended as they are with the history of one who passed from my quiet household to the quieter churchyard close by.

But I must be up and away: neither my Kentish pony nor my man of Kent will brook delay. The boxes are packed in the village cart; my affectionate dog, the faithful companion of years, lingers with something of human instinct over his caresses to those at the gate. We pass the venerable church; and sportive children on their way to school: it seems but yesterday that I held them in my arms; we cross the rushing stream, and then I have left my parish and pastorate behind for ever.

A kind friend connected with the railway had taken care that I should have one of the newest and best vans for my horse; and the adjoining compartment I cushioned and made as comfortable as a first-class carriage. Thus, with the dog at my feet, and the pony's head within a few inches, when I drew back a convenient slide, we were whirled through the pleasant pastures of Kent and Surrey. Animals are like children: when they are shut up in a railway carriage "they must eat or they will cry;" and when the novelty of the situation had worn off I found enough to do in attending to my four-footed friends.

"The largest vans; the newest appliances; the readiest delivery." I had found the first two declarations must be understood in a Pickwickian sense; but I was repeatedly assured that within forty-eight hours the goods would be at the threshold of my new home. Alas! like the credulous Cowper, I became the "dupe of to-morrow." As we entered my fresh parish, one of the prettiest in the midland counties, the beautiful bells gave me a cheerful welcome and "Merrie sange the

Bird as she sat upon the Boughe," but I could see no trace of wheels in front of the vicarage. The readiest delivery was—ha—hum!

With my little household round me, we anxiously watched and waited. There was not a chair, not a bed, not a scrap of carpet; and the best part of the day had gone. What if we should have to subsist upon the only edible in the garden, some two-year old parsnips, and to sit on the stairs all night. The house looked clean and inviting, having just been thoroughly put in order, and the room in which I write is almost historical: for it was here that the Johnson of the Nineteenth Century, Doctor Samuel Parr, would occasionally come on his ambling pony to smoke a pipe with his great friend, Jack Bartlam, the vicar; and if these old panels could give out a few spirited replies in responsive raps, what energetic protests should I hear from the old Whig Divine!

Samuel Parr, like his London prototype, was very fond of good living. Many are the stories about him, and one of my present parishioners remembers him well. Arriving at Warwick early one morning in June from Hatton, he called at a friend's house and was asked to stay dinner. He accepted as usual, and the host knowing his penchant deferentially inquired what he would like. Quoth the Doctor, crossing his legs and rolling his tongue as if in anticipation of good things to come. "Oh, anything, anything, I am not a proud man; a loin of veal with plenty of kidney and fat; and have a leg of lamb and mint sauce in case the veal should not be done." The host was relieved to get off so easily. "Stay," lisped the bon-vivant, "I am not in the least particular, but, in ordering the salmon don't forget the middle cut; and I know they grow good cucumbers at Stoneleigh Abbey."

"What about the sweets?" timidly suggested the hostess. "Ah, Madam, I am easily satisfied;" adding gallantly, "we can leave these to the ladies; variety is charming."

But it seemed in our case, as if we should be compelled to dine with Duke Humphry; and a prolonged fast is not perhaps out of place in a benefice worth only sixty pounds a year. Presently, however, advancing slowly up the steep hill, appeared the vans accompanied as before by helpers pressed into service on the way. Profuse apologies were offered for the delay. The railway company had not proved so pliable as had been expected; the vans could not be got off the trucks; no horses could be engaged, &c. The gentleman who looked as if he never properly went to bed, and never completely got up, was emphatic in asserting that such a circumstance had never happened before; and straightway expected letters testimonial for punctuality. "Shades of evening close not o'er us," thought I, as pensioners of the pavé, heavily laden, collided in narrow passages, blundered up steep stairs, deposited culinary articles in bed-rooms, and book-cases in the scullery. "If you are strong, be merciful," I sighed, as bang would go the cornice of a wardrobe, crack the leaf of a table, and smash the frame of a picture. Fortunately, darkness covers bruises and fractures. Poor fellows! they did the best they could.

It was a relief when the house was clear; and we were able to extemporise beds and blinds, and to make cheerful fires of the twigs which chattering jackdaws had obligingly popped down the yawning chimneys.

There were other creatures who also favoured an old house vacant during many months. The hollow walls, rotten wainscot, and a huge, unlighted roof, proved a capital playground for rats and mice. From numerous holes in the floors and closets we expected the vermin: but it was not until the candles were extinguished, and we were each in our own solitary bed on the floor, that the wakeful wretches began their gambols. From a hole near the hearth a pair of bright little eyes were discernible, then another and another, with a sharp squeak or two. Just as if each mouse, after furtively peeping, had been drawn back by the tail by its tiny brother with the remark "now let me have a look."

Presently a tap at the door by a lady who might remain calm behind a runaway horse; but a runaway rat, that was too dreadful. Suppressing her emotion, she began in a stage whisper: "I don't wish to alarm you, but I really *think* (here patter versus clatter overhead; voice strengthened), in fact, I am pretty well *sure* (squeak close by; voice rising to tremulous falsetto), there is a—*rat* in my room."

Upon a hasty inspection, next morning, the furniture was not so badly injured as I expected, considering the rough handling it had received: but all the polish and repair possible will not make it look as it used to look in the old home. The chairs have a peculiar way of doubling under when sat upon; the bedsteads have got the rickets; swing-glasses are under no control; and a certain unaccountable looseness pervades the table legs. Matters are not improved by the unevenness of the oaken floors, which sink towards the centre, and the irregularity of the walls. Heavy furniture leans forward, sometimes to the detriment of doors and drawers; and the heads of my dear friends start and swing from the walls as if again being gibbeted by photography.

Of course, callers come from a distance when least expected. I rush to the case where, anticipating such an occurrence, I had placed sundry bottles of sherry. When decanting, the cork comes out all too easily; that fact should have made me suspicious of the contents. Pale sherry, thought I; *how* pale I did not stay to notice. I even ventured to remark, when pressing it on my visitors, that I was afraid I could not obtain any so free from acidity in this locality. One gentleman half emptied his glass; something between a sneeze and a cough followed. Ah, a little gone the wrong way, I surmised. We continued our conversation until the callers left. How strange that they had not finished their wine! Could it be brandy by mistake? Oh, no! worse still. I had attempted to make some green grape wine last October. It had been quite forgotten; and this was a stray bottle. I tasted the very pale sherry so free from acidity. Alas! it was worse than verjuice.

THREE MINUTES TO TWELVE.

ON a cold December night, some twenty years ago, when the earth was bound in a black frost and the bitter wind blew strong and shrewdly, I was returning home from spending the evening at a friend's house, situated some three or four miles out of the town. The sky was so black, the country lanes were so dark, that I was truly thankful when the scattered lights of an outlying suburb began to twinkle in the distance; and it was with a sigh of relief that I stopped under the first lamp-post I came to and looked at my watch. It was no easy task, for the lamp-glass had a pane broken and the strong wind blew the gas in all directions and almost extinguished it.

I read the time at last—three minutes to twelve—and, looking up from my watch-face, I started to see a man standing close opposite me. I had heard nothing of his approach. We looked at each other but for a moment, yet it was time sufficient to imprint his features indelibly on my memory. A tall, shabby man, in a threadbare, black frock coat and a seedy tall hat, his face lantern-jawed and sallow, his eyes sunken and lustreless, his beard long and ill-trimmed. In a tone of elaborate civility he asked me the time, thanked me for my answer, and, giving me good-night, passed into the black darkness which seemed to engulf him like a grave.

I turned for a moment to think of his lonely walk in that grim obscurity, and resumed my homeward way, laughing at myself for the start he had given me, and reflecting that the strong wind had blown away the sound of his approach. I thought of him as I sat and smoked my pipe over my fire, and felt a comfortable shudder steal upon me as I imagined him facing the bitter blast in his insufficient clothing.

In the course of a week or two the incident—trifling enough, Heaven knows—faded from my memory and I thought no more of it.

In those days I was actively engaged in the timber trade, and the course of my business took me a good deal about the county, and brought me largely in contact with the agents of the different noblemen and country gentlemen of the district. With one of these agents who resided near the county town of L——, I had numerous transactions, and I used often to run down to L—— to meet him, for the town was only fifteen miles away, and was on a line of railway. It was a dull little hole enough, that only warmed up into life when the militia were out, or the assizes were on.

One night I returned from L——, having just made a large purchase from my friend the agent, whose master, a sporting nobleman, was reduced to cut down the family timber. When I fell asleep that night I had a very simple but vivid dream. I thought I was standing

on a lofty hill. By my side stood a veiled figure, who, with a commanding gesture, motioned me towards the town of L——, which lay in the far distance. Then I awoke.

Of course I explained the thing to myself easily enough. I had been a good deal engaged in the neighbourhood of the place and had a large venture more or less remotely connected with it. Still the dream was so vivid that I could not dismiss it from my thoughts during the whole of the day, and when I went to bed at night I wondered if it would again visit me.

It did come again: precisely the same dream in precisely the same manner. Once more I found a convincing explanation. Doubtless I had been thinking too much about the first dream, and this had given rise to the second. But my explanation did not convince me in the least; again I was haunted by the thing throughout the day, and when I came home at night my preoccupation was so evident that it attracted the attention of my wife. She questioned me upon the cause, and, only too thankful to unbosom myself of what was now almost a trouble, I told her about the dream and its repetition. She had the tact not to laugh at me, but was evidently little impressed by the narrative.

The third night it came again, if anything, more vividly and startlingly than before. This time I was utterly unhinged; the pale face that fronted me in the looking-glass was hardly recognisable for my own. I went down to breakfast, filled with a foreboding of some misfortune—bad news in my letters—I knew not what.

The maid entered with the letter-bag.

"There," said my wife, passing me a letter on which was the L—— postmark. "That breaks your dream, John."

I opened it hurriedly. It was from the agent requesting me to meet him at L—— that day at one o'clock, to arrange a difficulty that had arisen in the performance of his contract.

I was intensely relieved. Here was an opportunity to go to L——, and perhaps the very fact of going would put me right. There were two fast trains to L—— in the morning, but I decided to go by the first, regardless of the fact that I should have some hours to wait. So I found myself shortly in a first-class compartment, speeding away towards my destination.

The carriage was full. Pipes exhaled their fragrance, newspapers were turned and flattened, and there was that leisurely kind of morning conversation that prevails among men going off by an early train to their day's work. I soon discovered that I had fallen amongst a party of barristers, and their chief topic was a peculiarly interesting case, which was to be finished to-day at the L—— assizes.

"He must sum up against the prisoner," said a gentleman with a fat, florid face, and long sandy whiskers, who wore a light overcoat and shepherd's plaid trousers. "The defence was a complete failure and deserved to be."

"It was certainly rather audacious," returned a clean-shaven young man with a double eye-glass, who sat opposite me. "But I don't like circumstantial evidence."

"All evidence is more or less circumstantial," answered he of the florid complexion; "and this man is as clearly guilty to my mind as if there had been a dozen witnesses to stand by and see him do the deed. That's my opinion, Heywood." And the oracle disappeared behind its newspaper.

Feeling glad to discover any topic that would divert my thoughts from their gloomy forebodings, I addressed myself to Heywood, the young barrister, with whom I had a slight acquaintance.

"You seem much interested in this trial that is going on," I said. "May I ask if you are engaged upon it?"

"No," he answered. "But it is a curious case. A man, a clerk dismissed from his employment, is accused of murdering the cashier of the firm. The evidence against him is entirely circumstantial, but the defence broke down at the most critical point, and the case certainly looks very black for the prisoner."

The train was now slackening speed, and there was a general rising. I rose too.

"Are you going to get out here?" said Mr. Heywood, opening the door as we glided into the station. "Have you come down so early on business?"

"Ye—es," I said, wishing to goodness I knew what the immediate business was. "Nothing very urgent, though," I added, half to myself, as I got out.

"If you have the time to spare, you had better turn in and hear the end of the trial," said Heywood. "The court will be crowded with ladies, no doubt, but I can smuggle you into a corner."

Not knowing what to do with myself for the next two hours, I accepted the offer with gratitude. I was soon seated in an obscure corner of a dingy, ill-lighted, ill-ventilated court-house, which would have been ill-smelling, too, had it not been for the scent wafted from the numerous ladies who were present. One of these, a buxom female obstruction who ought to have known better, was just in front of me and blocked my view with an enormous bonnet. I could not see the prisoner, or his counsel, or even the clock over his head, at which the people kept looking eagerly as the hour fixed for the recommencement of the trial approached. At last there was a stir and bustle, caused by persons invisible to me, then a call for silence, and, after a few preliminaries, the summing-up commenced.

I listened the more intently because I could see nothing. The clear, cold, telling sentences cut deep into my consciousness. How distinct and convincing it all was! How all those minute facts, the mute testimony of footmarks and the like, arranged and distributed by that powerful intellect, grouped themselves into the damning proof of guilt. I cared nothing for the prisoner, had no personal interest

in the trial, but my mind was wonderfully fascinated by this tale of horror. At length the weighty tones ceased and a murmur of relief and expectation ran round the assembly. At this moment the woman with the huge bonnet shifted her seat, and I obtained a full view of the prisoner. I started involuntarily. *Where had I seen that face before?*

The jury returned after a short absence; the verdict was Guilty, accompanied with a recommendation to mercy. Again the judge's solemn tones sounded through the court, again they ceased.

There was dead silence. I sprang to my feet as if impelled to do so by some unseen power, and looked steadily at the prisoner. His face was averted from me for the moment, but the looks of the people showed that he was about to speak. Slowly he turned round and, in a voice whose deep, earnest tones could be heard all over the assembly, he said:

"There lives but one man who can prove me innocent—*and there he stands.*"

With white face and outstretched arm he pointed—*at me.* I gazed at him with a sudden flash of recognition. It was the man I had seen under the lamp. And, by a strange coincidence, at this moment the court clock struck twelve.

The plea that had been set up by the defence was an alibi. But there was a space of some two hours that could not be accounted for, and the theory of the prosecution was that the crime had been committed during that time. My evidence supplied the missing link; for the place in which I had seen the man was so far distant from the scene of the murder that it was impossible for him to have been anywhere near at the time of its commission.

And the dream? Only a coincidence, you will say, perhaps, or a fit of indigestion, or my timber contract. Nevertheless, as I have told it you, so it happened. Explain it away who can.

A DRAMATIC CRITIQUE, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

By Mary E. Penn, "Author of Desmond's Model," &c.

"BRAVO, bravo! well done, Miss Sylvester!" cried the manager of the Royal Kensington Theatre. "That speech will bring the house down."

The beautiful and popular young actress, dropping her tragedy airs all at once, acknowledged the compliment with a sweet smile and a sweeping curtsey, then came towards the speaker. He was sitting at a little "property" table on the stage, with his back to the footlights, superintending the last rehearsal of the new play, the author of which was Miss Sylvester's brother.

"You are satisfied, Mr. Hope?" she asked brightly.

"More than satisfied! Your acting will save the play if anything can do it."

Her face clouded. "You speak as if you doubted its success?"

He screwed up his mouth dubiously. "Well, you see, it is rather formidable—a blank-verse tragedy in five acts, with Boadicea for a heroine! I doubt whether it will 'draw.'"

"Then why did you accept it?" she asked quickly.

"I'll be hanged if I know," Mr. Hope replied, rubbing up his hair the wrong way. "During a temporary aberration of intellect I suppose. I didn't mean to vex you," he added kindly, noticing her expression; "it is not that I don't appreciate its beauties, only I am afraid they will be 'caviare' to the audience."

"Don't listen to him, Miss Sylvester," interposed the manager's wife, giving her an encouraging touch on the shoulder. "You know that Hope never 'tells a flattering tale' about a new piece till it has filled the treasury."

"Which this one won't"—put in Mr. Deloraine, the tragedian in a stage "aside."

"If it fails as a tragedy Mr. Sylvester might turn it into a burlesque," airily suggested young Carleton, admiring the effect of his own feet in sandals.

"Your acting will save him the trouble," retorted Miss Sylvester, as she turned from the group, and retired up the stage.

There was a general laugh, and the *jeune premier* looked slightly discomfited.

"You deserved a snub for your ill-nature," was Mrs. Hope's comment. "It's a shame to discourage her when you know how she has set her heart on her brother's play succeeding. Whatever we may think of it, she considers it a work of genius."

"And so does the author, by the airs he gives himself," young

Carleton returned, with a shrug; "if it fails, perhaps he will learn modesty."

"At my expense," added Mr. Hope, drily. "It has cost a small fortune to mount this piece. Come, you had better go on with the scene; we are wasting time."

At length, after many interruptions, the rehearsal came to an end.

As Edith Sylvester left the theatre she paused to make an inquiry of the stage-door keeper; a snuffy, surly old man, in a velvet skull-cap, who was ensconced in a dark little den close to the entrance.

"Watson, have you seen my brother?"

"He left the theatre half an hour ago, Miss Sylvester," said a voice behind her, before the other could reply.

It was a gentleman who spoke; a young fellow of five or six and twenty, with a keen, vivacious, clever face, and grey eyes, somewhat too near together.

She turned, and seeing who it was, presented him with two little gloved fingers. She had never been able to make up her mind whether she liked Frederick Procter or detested him, though she had no doubt at all about his feelings for herself. His devotion was proof against all rebuffs. He was a barrister, but condescended to "coquet with literature" while waiting for briefs, and was the author of the light piece which would precede the tragedy.

"Your brother asked me to tell you that he had a headache and could not stay longer," he continued.

"I am glad he was not there while they were pulling the play to pieces," she returned, as she passed out into the street.

A spring shower was falling, and her admirer officiously put up her umbrella, and walked on by her side, uninvited.

"They were very disagreeable," he returned, "but, fortunately, the opinion of the little world behind the scenes is not of much consequence. It is for the public to judge."

"There will be a capital house to-night," she said after a pause; "all the stalls and boxes are taken, and no orders have been given except to the Press."

"The critics will muster in force, I suppose—the great Oliver among the rest," he remarked, glancing at her face as he pronounced the name."

"Who is the 'great Oliver?' Oh—you mean Oliver Dane. What paper does he write for, do you know?"

"I know—but perhaps I had better not tell you. If his criticism should be in the 'slashing' style"——

"Oh, there is not much danger of that," she replied, laughing; "don't you know that he is my brother's particular friend?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"It is not my experience that one's particular friends make the most indulgent critics," he remarked; "especially if one has had the

impertinence to succeed where they have failed—and I believe Mr. Dane failed conspicuously as a dramatist some years ago."

Edith frowned.

"I wonder what he has done to offend you?" she said, coldly. "I notice you seldom mention his name without a sneer. I thought he was your friend."

"So he was—till he became my rival," was the quick reply.

She crimsoned under her veil to the roots of her fair hair, and gave him a look which might have annihilated him.

"You know it is so," he persisted. "You know that I would die for you, and that he ——"

"That is enough," she interrupted, hurrying on. "I will say good-bye now, Mr. Procter."

"Nay, do not leave me in that way," he pleaded. "Do you dislike me so much that you cannot endure my presence?"

"I dislike your conversation this morning," she answered quietly.

He drew in his lips, and gave her a curious look.

"I did not mean to offend you. Pray forgive me. Let me be your friend, at least, if nothing more."

After a moment's hesitation she put out her hand.

"My friend, if you will, but nothing more," she echoed.

"I understand. I will try not to offend again. Good-bye. I hope both the audience and the critics will be in a genial mood to-night. By the way"—he turned back as if struck by a sudden thought—"If you particularly wish to know the name of Mr. Dane's paper—it is *The Planet*. But pray don't let him know that I told you."

"I will not say a word," she promised.

"Thank you." And she gave him a friendly nod and smile as she went her way.

The home which she shared with her brother and widowed mother was a small but daintily appointed house in the artistic region of South Kensington. There was nothing in the least Bohemian about Miss Sylvester or her surroundings, for the young actress was a lady by birth and education, and on her father's death, followed by the wreck of their fortune, she had adopted her present profession. How brilliantly she had succeeded all the world knew, though few were aware by what courageous effort and dauntless perseverance her success had been won.

"Where is Claud, mother?" she asked, entering the pleasant little morning-room where Mrs. Sylvester was sitting.

The latter, a delicate, refined, and still beautiful woman, with a gentle manner and a gracious smile, looked up from the book she was reading.

"He is lying down, dear. He brought a headache from the theatre as usual. Poor boy—it is a trying time for him!"

Edith stood at the window, turning her gloves in her hand, and

looking out vaguely at the quiet suburban street, where the soft spring rain was falling, and an organ was grinding "Il Balen" out of tune.

"Yes," she acquiesced, "but I wish he had a little more tact and patience. He has offended everyone behind the curtain."

"He belongs to the 'irritable race of poets,'" Mrs. Sylvester replied, with a smile. "We must not expect him to be a philosopher as well. I think I will go and see how he is," she added, laying her book aside.

"Don't go," Edith interposed quickly, drawing back from the window with a sudden accession of colour to her cheeks, as a hansom stopped at the door. "Here is Mr. Dane."

But her mother had already left the room.

A few seconds afterwards the visitor was ushered in. A tall, well-built man, of five-and-thirty, with handsome but somewhat stern features; a short brown beard and moustache, and dark, penetrating eyes, which could soften into tenderness on occasion, though, as a rule, they looked at the world proudly and rather defiantly, as if they "cared not for its smile nor frown."

He greeted her with the ease of an old acquaintance, and took up his position with one elbow on the chimney-piece, while Edith, throwing off her hat, subsided into a low chair by the hearth.

"Well," he began, "how did the rehearsal go this morning?"

"Fairly well," she answered, "but Mr. Hope does not seem very sanguine of success."

"Does not he? But he is not of a sanguine disposition in spite of his name. I see no reason why it should not succeed, though"—he paused, absently examining a Dresden china pug on the mantel-shelf, "I think it would have been better if Claud had chosen a less ambitious subject."

Edith looked anxious. "He has set all his hopes on it, poor lad. If it fails the disappointment will crush him."

"Crush him? Nonsense!" returned her companion, cheerfully. "He must not expect to reach a pinnacle of fame *per saltum*. Success is seldom won without rebuffs and disappointments, as you yourself have experienced. To say the truth, Claud needs a little discipline of that sort. You have spoilt him."

She made no answer, but her face expressed dissent.

"Is it true that you have written for the stage yourself?" she inquired presently.

He tossed back his head with a hearty, genial laugh.

"I wonder what good-natured friend of mine told you that? Yes, it is true. Long ago—in my boyish days—I too wrote a tragedy, which I believe I considered one of the finest productions of the age, but the public was of a distinctly different opinion. However, the failure did not crush me. It merely decided me to turn my energies in a different direction."

"I wish Claud had your strength of character," she said, with a half-sigh, "but we cannot change his nature. He has genius, and the defects that accompany it."

"The defects I perceive, the genius I must take on trust," was Mr. Dane's reply.

She rose with an impatient movement, and began turning over the books and papers on the table.

"I know you do not believe in him—you never did," she said, resentfully. "I think you will be almost disappointed if his play succeeds and proves you were wrong."

He looked at her with pained surprise, and when she met his eyes, her anger died a sudden death.

"I did not mean that," she exclaimed, in her quick, impulsive way, putting out her hand. "You wish him well, I know, and I can't expect you to see him with my eyes."

He took her hand in both his own, looking at her with an expression that softened every line of his face.

"You do not suppose I could be indifferent to anyone so dear to you?" he said gently; "to you, Edith, who are so dear to me?"

The pressure of his fingers sent a thrill to her heart. She gave him a quick, shy glance, then drooped her head, and "suddenly, sweetly, strangely blushed."

Before he could speak again, there was a footstep in the corridor outside, and she hastily disengaged her hand. He detained her as she was turning away.

"Do you ever take an early walk in Kensington Gardens, as you used last summer?"

"Sometimes," she answered, smiling. "Why?"

"Will you be there to-morrow morning at about ten o'clock?—by the Round Pond? I have something to say to you which can best be said under the trees where I have so often lingered to think of you."

"I will come," she whispered, and her heart leapt with a sudden joy that almost startled her. At the same moment her brother entered the room.

He was little more than a youth, with a fair, beardless face, dreamy blue eyes, and a quantity of untidy fair hair which he had a restless trick of pushing back from his forehead.

"How is your head, dear?" his sister asked affectionately.

"Splitting," was the brief reply, as he crossed the room to shake hands with the visitor. "Don't mention the play, if you please," he added hastily, before the latter could speak. "I am sick of the subject. Would that mine enemy had written—a tragedy!"

Mr. Dane laughed.

"May I be allowed to say that, from what I have heard, Miss Sylvester will make a sensation in the part of Boadicea?"

"Oh, Edith will do well enough," her brother admitted, carelessly;

"but the rest are sticks—though, of course, if it succeeds they will take all the credit, while if it fails the fault will be mine."

"You seem in a cynical mood this morning," his friend observed pleasantly. "You had better come and lunch with me at the club. You will take a brighter view of life after a few glasses of claret. Good-bye"—he added, turning to Edith. "When next we meet I hope I shall have to congratulate you on another triumph."

With a significant glance of reminder he pressed her hand, and followed her brother from the room.

That night the "Royal Kensington" was crowded as it had seldom been before. Blank-verse tragedy was a startling novelty on its boards, which had hitherto been devoted to "society" comedies and adaptations from the French. The new play was sure of a success of curiosity, if nothing more.

The manager's spirits rose as he surveyed the crowded and brilliant house from his box, pointing out various notabilities to Claud, who was too nervous to listen.

"Your play will be tried by a select jury—the cream of London society is here to-night," Mr. Hope added, as the curtain drew up on the opening scene.

As the work of a lad of twenty "Boadicea" was certainly a remarkable production. Though crude and immature it was strikingly original, with many passages of great poetic beauty. It remained to be seen whether these would compensate for its prolixity and lack of dramatic interest.

The first act passed off successfully, and was concluded to applause—a sound which thrilled the young author and brought a flush of triumph to Edith's face.

"You said it would be 'caviare' to the audience—but they seem to like 'caviare,'" she remarked to Mr. Hope, as she passed him at the wings—looking every inch a queen, in her picturesque barbaric costume, with flowing hair and white arms bare to the shoulder.

"H'm—I would rather the applause came later; it is safer to 'begin with a little aversion,'" the manager answered, with a look of doubt.

His doubts were changed to gloomiest certainty as the evening proceeded. The audience were politely attentive, but—except when Edith was before them—evidently bored. Of her success, however, there could be no doubt. Whenever she appeared the flagging interest revived, and all the faults of the play were forgotten. Never before had she displayed such passion, power, and tenderness. A wave of inspiration seemed to have raised her all at once to the level of a great artist.

"She has saved the play," Mr. Dane remarked to a fellow-journalist, when at last the curtain fell on Boadicea's death-scene.

"It is only a respite," the other returned, with a shrug. "I doubt

if it will live another night. It is too long by half, and—how dull!"

But Edith had no such fears, and was angry with Mr. Hope for expressing them. "With the applause ringing in your ears you can tell me it was not a success!" she exclaimed.

"It was you they applauded, not the play," put in Claud, half-jealously.

"We shall see what *The Planet* says about it to-morrow," she returned, with a glance at Mr. Dane, who had come round from the front to offer congratulations.

He looked at her curiously. "Why do you mention that paper in particular?"

"Well, because it is one of the most important and influential, and because—I have a presentiment that the notice will be favourable."

"Do not be vexed if it is otherwise," he replied gently. She glanced at him inquiringly, but he only smiled as he shook hands, and added in an undertone—"Adieu—till to-morrow!"

Kensington Gardens on a bright May morning.

The sunbeams lay warm and golden on the daisied turf, the birds were twittering volubly among the young green leaves, and a thrush was singing his sweet "full-throated" song as unrestrainedly as if London were a hundred miles away.

Oliver Dane was first at the trysting place.

He stood at the margin of the Round Pond, watching the water-fowl, and listening to the thrush; glancing now and then down the path where he expected Edith to appear. It lay in shadow, except at the far end, where a gleam of sunlight struck across it. That shadowed vista seemed to him an image of his own life—which, for all its success, had been sunless and solitary; and the far-off gleam was the hope that had brightened it of late with "the light that never was on sea or shore."

As the fancy crossed his mind he saw her approaching under the noble old trees. "'She is coming, my life, my fate,'"—he murmured to himself, with a smile, as he went forward to meet her.

The smile faded as he approached her; there was something in her face which puzzled him. A cold, impassive expression, that seemed to disguise it like a mask.

"You are not well?" he said, looking at her earnestly as they shook hands.

"I am a little tired."

"I am not surprised to hear it, after your exertions last night. But the triumph you won was well worth the effort. It ——"

"You shall congratulate me another time," she interrupted, with a faint smile. "I have just been reading the newspaper critiques, and I feel that my head will not stand more flattery at present."

"Well—it was not to speak of the play that I asked you to meet

me this morning," he responded, drawing her hand through his arm; "but of a subject which concerns me more nearly. Edith, what I have to say can be told in three words, but they carry a heartful of meaning—I love you."

He paused, looking down at her, but she did not speak, and her face was averted.

"That confession has been near my lips many times before to-day, but I hesitated to speak, fearing to lose your friendship and gain nothing in exchange. But lately—may I confess that I have had hopes? Edith, I have loved you from the first moment I saw you, and, ever since, you have been the centre of all my thoughts and desires. You do not speak. Perhaps I have taken you by surprise? You did not recognise love in the guise of friendship—nor did I myself at first," he added with a serious smile; "my heart entertained an angel unawares."

When he ceased speaking, Edith drew a deep breath and looked up. She was pale, and her eyes were troubled, but there was the same unfamiliar expression on her face which he had noticed at first; something cold and almost hostile.

"Answer me, dear," he said, pressing her hand to his side. "Will you be my wife?"

She stopped short and drew her hand away, looking him full in the face for the first time. "No," was her reply.

He started as if she had struck him, looking at her blankly. "Edith," he faltered, "what do you mean?"

"I mean that I cannot accept your offer," she answered deliberately.

For a moment he could not speak; he felt stunned.

"You refuse me—coldly, carelessly, without a word of explanation?" he exclaimed.

"Is any explanation needed? I am not conscious of having encouraged the hopes you speak of."

"Not purposely, perhaps, but I certainly thought I had grounds for hope, and only yesterday, you——Edith," he broke off, "what has come between us?"

He took her hand, gazing into her face as if he would read her heart in it. "You are changed since we parted last night. Have you heard anything which ——"

"You had better not question me," she interrupted. "I have answered you—that is enough. Please let go my hand."

He only held it more closely, in a grasp that almost hurt her.

"Look in my eyes and tell me that you do not love me, or I will not believe you are in earnest," he said imperiously.

She flushed to her forehead, and turned her face away. "You are sceptical," she replied, with a forced laugh. "I presume you think no woman in her senses would refuse you? I am the one exception, which proves the rule, you see."

His face changed suddenly, all the tenderness dying out of it. He dropped her hand and stepped back from her.

"I am convinced now," he said, quietly. "I will importune you no further. Shall we walk on?"

They walked in silence to the entrance, then he paused.

"I shall go abroad shortly, for an indefinite time, so this is good-bye," he said, putting out his hand.

"Good-bye," she echoed, and they parted. Edith went her way with her head erect, and step not less elastic than usual, but her face was white, and her eyes dim with suppressed pain.

"I said I would punish him, and I have," she muttered; "but—I have punished myself more."

When she reached home, Claud was dawdling over his late breakfast with a newspaper propped up before him.

"Is that *The Planet?* I told them not to give it to you," she said, anxiously.

"Were you afraid that I should be intoxicated by the flattery of this critique?" he asked, with a short laugh.

"It is the cruellest thing that ever was written!" she exclaimed.

"You have no reason to say so," he remarked, with emphasis.

"Do you think I care to be praised at your expense? To have my acting held up to admiration while your beautiful play is turned into ridicule? I will never forgive Oliver Dane for this."

"Dane!" he echoed, looking at her in astonishment; "do you mean to say Dane wrote this thing?"

"So I was told by Mr. Procter."

He took up the paper, frowning doubtfully as he ran his eye down the column.

"It is certainly like his style, and I know that he writes for this paper," he muttered. "Bah—so much for 'friendship'!" he added, as he flung it across the table and left the room.

The manager's forebodings were realized that night. Edith's best efforts could not galvanize the play into life a second time. It did not die a violent death, however, but merely languished forlornly through its five long acts to a lame and impotent conclusion.

Claud disappeared from the theatre before the curtain fell. He hurried home, hastily packed a few necessaries in a portmanteau and left the house, informing his mother that he intended to keep away till his "fiasco" was forgotten.

"He would not even say where he was going," Mrs. Sylvester told Edith when she returned.

"Perhaps he hardly knew himself," the latter replied. "We shall hear from him soon, no doubt."

But days passed into weeks, and the expected letter did not come.

Meantime "Boadicea" vanished abruptly from the bills, and was shortly afterwards succeeded by a new "society" play, polished and

cynical, which was understood to have been written expressly for Miss Sylvester by Mr. Frederick Procter.

A sultry sunny midsummer afternoon was drawing to a close.

There was a flower show at the Horticultural Gardens, and a long line of carriages was waiting in Exhibition Road. The grounds were still crowded, and the bright array of summer toilettes rivalled the flowers in colour and variety.

"The best dressed woman here is Miss Sylvester," remarked one of a group of young men who had turned to look after her.

"And the handsomest," put in another voice. "Not one of the professional beauties can hold a candle to her. Who's with her?"

"Fred Procter—author of 'Hearts and Coronets'—don't you know? They say she is going to marry him."

Edith's quick ears caught the words, and a sudden colour flushed her face.

"The sun makes my head ache," she said abruptly to her companion; "let us find a seat in the shade."

They found it presently under some trees, in a remote part of the grounds, away from the crowd, but not out of hearing of the Hungarian band, which was playing a weird mournful air in the minor key.

Taking the fan from her hand the young man leaned forward with his elbow on his knee, and fanned her gently, earnestly watching the beautiful face, which just now had a clouded look.

"Are you displeased because gossip couples our names?" he asked at length. She shrugged her shoulders with the air of lassitude and indifference which had been growing upon her of late.

"If gossip of that sort troubled me I should never be at peace. Rumour has married me to half a dozen different people this season."

"But suppose—suppose I asked you to make this rumour true?" he said, after a pause.

She shook her head.

"No," she said gently; "it is impossible. I will not do you the injustice of marrying you without love."

"But I am content to wait for that," he returned, quickly; "it would come in time I feel certain. You could not resist such devotion as I should offer you. I don't pretend to be worthy of you, Edith; I am but an indifferent sort of a fellow I know, but if you would only give me your hand, you could raise me to a higher level."

There was genuine emotion in his face, unmistakeable sincerity in his voice. She looked at him—and hesitated. She was in a mood when any change seems a relief. She felt an impatient longing to get rid of old memories and associations, and begin life afresh under new conditions.

He construed her silence as consent, and a light of triumph sprang into his eyes. But the next moment his expression changed abruptly,

and he muttered under his breath something that was certainly not a benediction, as he glanced at an approaching figure.

Edith raised her head and saw that it was Oliver Dane.

Her heart gave a great leap, then sank. It would only be pain to meet him, cold and estranged as he would be.

But there was no trace of coldness in Mr. Dane's greeting.

He came forward with hand outstretched, a cordial smile on his lips, his dark eyes beaming with pleasure.

"I have been looking for you all over the grounds," he said.

She glanced at him in perplexity. He looked as radiant as if some great good fortune had befallen him. Had he forgotten—so soon?

"I thought you were on the other side of the Channel," she answered, with a constrained smile, as she gave him her hand. The young barrister rose, with a stiff bow, and drew back, behind her chair, where he stood, looking oddly nervous and ill at ease, as he trifled with her fan.

"So I was, a few hours ago," was the reply; "but I heard something yesterday which—which decided me to return at once. I have just called at your house and Mrs. Sylvester told me you were here, with the Hardings. Claud is at home. I brought him back with me."

"Claud!" she exclaimed in surprise. "Where did you meet him?"

"We came across each other in Paris only yesterday. He had been living on a fourth storey in the Quartier Latin, like a hero of the 'Vie de Bohême,' but I fancy he was getting tired of exile, and was not sorry to see the face of a friend."

"Did he meet you as a friend?" she asked involuntarily. He smiled.

"Well—not at first, certainly. His manner was even more hostile than your own at our last meeting. I found that you had both been under a strange misconception with regard to a critique on the play, which ——"

"Did you not write it?" she interrupted, rising as she spoke.

"Certainly not. Mr. Procter will tell you that he succeeded me as dramatic critic to *The Planet* some months ago."

She uttered an exclamation. "But it was he who said ——"

"It was a misunderstanding," Mr. Procter interposed, hurriedly. "I will explain it another time. Come, dearest," he added, drawing her hand through his arm with a quick glance of triumph at his rival; "shall we return to your friends?"

At the familiar words and action Mr. Dane started, glancing from one to the other inquiringly. Then his face changed suddenly, all the brightness fading out of it.

"I perceive that I am de trop," he said drily. "I will take my leave."

She snatched her hand away, colouring hotly.

"No, no —— you don't understand," she began; "I ——"

"I understand that I have come too late," was his reply. He bowed to her gravely and turned away, without another word. When they were alone Edith turned to her companion; her face white and her eyes glittering.

"You have deceived me," she said, in a low tone of suppressed passion; "deliberately and intentionally deceived me, to gain your own ends. But I shall not reproach you—I fear if I said anything I should say too much. Please leave me, and let us never meet again."

He turned pale. "You are not going to dismiss me in this way!—you cannot have the heart, when you know that I love you so madly—"

She interrupted him by a look which seemed to place a gulf between them.

There was a moment's silence, then he said in an altered voice: "Edith, I will undo the mischief I have done. He shall know that you are still free. He will return to you ——"

She shook her head.

"He will—he shall! Only say that you forgive me before I go," he pleaded.

She looked at him irresolutely a moment, then gave him her hand in silence. Glancing right and left to make sure that no one was in sight he pressed it passionately to his lips. The next moment he was gone.

When Edith reached home, she found her mother rejoicing over the return of the truant, who seemed rather improved than otherwise by his voluntary exile. He saluted his sister with unusual effusion.

"Have you seen Dane?" he inquired, after their first greetings had been exchanged; "he rushed off, declaring he could not rest till he had set himself right with you. He is the best fellow in the world! Mother, did I tell you that he was going to start a new paper and I am to be on the staff?"

Mrs. Sylvester looked doubtful. "I should hardly have thought journalism was suited to you, dear. With your ——"

"Don't say 'genius!'" the lad interrupted, with a laugh and a blush. "You make me feel such a sorry impostor. Dane has more talent in his little finger than I have in my whole body."

At this, his mother raised her eyebrows and his sister smiled. Such modesty in Claud was as rare as it was refreshing.

After dinner Edith left them, on the plea of a headache, and retreated to the morning-room, where she threw herself on the couch, burying her face in her hands. It was true that her head ached, but her heart ached too, as it never had in her life before, with a pain of vain regret and desolate longing.

The shadows gathered round her as she lay, feeling numbed and stupefied. She did not hear the door open, and started when a voice at her side uttered her name.

"Who is it?" she asked, as she rose, peering doubtfully at the intruder.

"It is I," the voice replied, and two warm, firm hands clasped her own. She caught her breath with a sob of joy and relief.

"Oliver!"

He drew her to him, putting back the disordered hair from her forehead.

"We seem fated to misunderstand each other, Edith, you and I," he said gently. "Is it true what Procter has just told me,—that you refused him this afternoon on the ground that your love was given elsewhere?"

She bent her head in assent.

"Now, dear," he continued, putting her away from him so that he could look into her face, "let there be no more shadows between us; tell me—is it I who have your heart?"

She looked at him with eyes that shone like stars through the dusk. "You had it long ago," she whispered. And lest he should retain any lingering doubt on the subject, she put her arms round his neck and drew his dark face down and kissed him.

BLOWING BUBBLES.

CHILDREN are we, our airy bubbles blowing,
Laughing, we see them lightly float away;
Life's sterner side unheeding, or unknowing,
We clutch at pleasure while 'tis called to-day.

To-day, and yet to-day, and so Time wingeth,
And armour rusts the while, and hearts grow cold;
The bubble's gone e'en with the mirth it bringeth,
Cheerless and lone, we wake to find us old.

For wind-blown fame we see men striving, dying;
'Tis self-hood all—a bubble at the best.
We sacrifice to self, all else denying,
Upon the altar of a vague unrest.

While Life, the hydra-headed, round us teeming,
Demands our hearts and brains, to work and fight,
And burning questions press, while we lie dreaming,
And wrongs cry out, which we might help to right.

On one hand Ease, all earnest labour shirking,
Ignoble ease, ere noble Rest be won;
Upon the other—in the furrows working
Through noon's fierce glare, and in the end, "Well done!"

E. L.

THE LATEST WONDER OF ANTWERP.

A PRINTING and publishing establishment of old Flemish construction, some three hundred years ago; and which for one reason and another had been shut up and forgotten, has lately been opened to the public; revealing to the curious in matters of history, all the luxury, the taste, the mode of living, the pursuits and domestic habits of the Flemish so long back as Philip II., husband of our first Mary, of Catholic memory.

This revelation has occurred in Antwerp, that quaint city of ancient Flemish build, where following the rows of houses which line the tortuous streets, you may catch a glimpse of gable ends ornamented with antique devices. Niches of saints and other objects of catholic worship; a city where mayhap a façade of no account gives entrance to a palatial suite of rooms, with corridors leading away into far distance and communicating with cabinets, alcoves, crypts, surprises, descents, ascents, hidden doors, sliding panels, moveable tapestry, to testify to the stormy times in which they were constructed, and in which the simple visitor of modern date may easily lose himself. And up through many a dingy street, we shall find treasures of forgotten history; such as in the muddy Rue des Brasseurs, where the Guild still meet in a room hoary with crumbling antiquity; such as in one bye-court where the way is spanned by a veritable "Bridge of Sighs," showing where the victims were covertly led from the Holy Tribunal on one side, to the underground dungeons on the other; and in the dark recesses of which last, the visitor shudders to mark appliances still remaining which testify to the horrors there perpetrated.

Aye! every stone in those dismal prisons cries to Heaven of the tortures and histories of poor humanity.

And it is precisely of this ancient city, so rich in vestiges of the past, that I would now testify, concerning a relic unique of its kind, and wonderful for the sincerity and interest of its records.

A printing and publishing establishment founded in the year 1556 by one Plantin, a Frenchman, learned as author of many works, and who at a time when printing was honoured as an art, noble above all other arts, fixed his princely head-quarters in Antwerp; at the same time that he founded a branch establishment in Leyden and another in Paris.

His heart was in printing; and after many struggles and strivings, he gathered up money enough to make a beginning at the above establishment, and was fairly prospering when the Inquisition instituted a suit against him for publishing heretical works. This occurred in 1562. He fled to France, where he remained until the matter

had blown over. Then he returned to Antwerp, and re-opened his establishment under happier auspices, and in strict conformity with the rules and regulations of austere orthodoxy.

In 1567 we find Plantin patronized by Philip II., who gave him an order for that wonderful Polyglot Bible, of which I propose hereafter to speak. Besides this, he printed the first missal issued after the authorised version of the Council of Trent; and from that time we find missals, breviaries, psalters, offices of the Virgin were issuing by thousands from the establishment, until it became famous throughout all Europe. Many potentates in France, in Italy, and elsewhere, made overtures to him with brilliant offers, if he would leave Belgium and settle in their domains; but he preferred remaining where he began; and he prospered.

But his prosperity, so hardly acquired, and earned through so many and difficult struggles, had scarcely begun to yield him the enjoyment he deserved, when it was cut short by the revolution which burst forth throughout all His Catholic Majesty's dominions in the North.—It was the same revolution which Motley narrates so well, in h is "Dutch Republic."

Antwerp was sacked in 1576, and for three days given up to the infuriated licence of the Spanish soldiery. The prostration which followed was only too indicative of the general ruin of the inhabitants. Plantin was obliged to close his printing establishment once more; and went to Leyden until that town also was sacked by the Duke of Parma; upon which he returned to Antwerp to struggle on as best he might till his death, which took place in 1589.

It is marvellous how this establishment escaped destruction, while palaces all round were burned to the ground, while churches were desecrated, houses and lines of houses, nay, whole quarters of the town, gutted, dismantled and given up to ruin. Many circumstances combined to protect it.

The founder had no sons to perpetuate his name and work; but his two daughters having taken unto themselves husbands whom he approved and liked, he constituted them his heirs. With that fondness so natural to men of genius who have worked their way up to eminence through worlds of struggle and striving, he bequeathed his whole establishment, with everything pertaining, to such of his descendants as might be capable and willing to carry on the works; and they would preserve the collections he had made, even where improvements and additions were considered necessary.

In accordance with these provisions, the sons-in-law carried on the business; but political troubles had not ended. They broke out anew with redoubled fury, so as completely to paralyse the industry of the nation; and of course to ruin its prosperity. From this outbreak, with but rare intervals of peace, Flanders was given up to wars and rumours of war perpetually; and when, during such intervals of quiet as occasionally occurred, the country sought to resume its original

activity, there was neither capital to support, nor encouragement from the great, to give life to any industrial enterprise.

Plantin's printing establishment was not quite dead, however; it still breathed even though the pulse was very low; and in 1629 under the peaceful sovereignty of the Infanta Isabel, governess of the Low Countries, it came to the possession of one of the founder's descendants: Balthazar Moretus Plantin—the most illustrious of the family, and perhaps the only one who deserves notice.

This man, although paralysed on one side, yet with a clear brain and untiring activity, gave life and movement once more to the business, and it flourished.

He added all the improvements in printing he could lay hold of; and by the help of the greatest painters and sculptors of his time, all of whom he patronized largely and generously, he collected quite a museum of works of art and literature. It is to him that is due all that rare acquisition of manuscripts, paintings, etchings, engravings, and other such treasures, which have given to those old rooms so inestimable a value.

After the death of Balthazar the establishment began to decline.

It does not appear as if the family cared much to associate themselves with its working. Balthazar's son, in honour of his father, was given titles of nobility by the King of Spain, with permission to continue the work of printing under his name.

But it is probable the title swamped the work, for it continued to go down year after year, until another revolution broke out, and somewhere about the year 1746, it was finally closed. After this the establishment may be said to have existed only in name.

Belgium was no longer a country where the arts might flourish. The allies made of it a general battle-field, where they marched and countermarched, and slaughtered one another, continually. Marlborough on one side, and the Generals of Louis XIV. on the other, swept the plains before them, and marked their course by devastation, fire and ruin.

We cannot wonder therefore if the descendants of Plantin sought to improve their fortunes in other ways than the dead industry of printing and publishing.

After a while the buildings which had once entertained princes and nobles, and whose halls and corridors had resounded to the clatter of work and the manufacture of civilisation; these so honoured buildings were degraded and turned into stables, to be hired out to the keepers of horses. The mangers were constructed of the precious old woodwork which had formed the doors. The beautiful carvings which had adorned the staircases and entrances, were torn away from their holdings, and thrown into the garret out of sight; while books, bibles, pictures, manuscripts, all of priceless value, were tumbled into the loft, and there left to moulder under the accumulating layer of dust and damp; like bones in a forgotten grave.

Somewhere about the beginning of this century the stablings and coach-houses came by inheritance to a bachelor, the last male descendant of the Plantins; when one day quite by accident, an antiquary strolled in while the master was out, and took to sauntering about the premises; perhaps struck by the antiquated look of the building. During his peregrinations he spied out a piece of sculptured wood which formed part of a shelf in one of the out-buildings; or, as some say, it was the handle of an old tub which first attracted his attention. However this may be, his curiosity was aroused. By and bye a conversation with the master resulted in a voyage of discovery through the deserted passages of the building, and to the piled up lumber rooms in the garret, where they came upon a heap of heterogeneous materials, repulsively dirty. It is said the dust flew into their faces as they entered, and nearly choked them.

Other visitors followed, and little by little the owner was awakened to the knowledge that his lofts and lumber rooms held curiosities of no small interest to the learned. He also found to his cost, that visitors valued them, and coveted them. Leaves were torn out of his illuminated bibles and manuscripts, chips and pieces broken off from his wood-carvings; and although he made his own two nieces accompany the visitors, and that these, one on each side, watched and closely guarded the treasures on view, nevertheless the pilfering went on just as usual. At last, thoroughly disgusted with the meanness and dishonesty of lovers of art, he shut up his treasures and the rooms which held them; and from that time obstinately refused to open them even to give the place an airing.

Years passed, and still the rooms were closed. But the strangeness of the matter got wind, and coming to the ears of the municipality they deputed some gentlemen to negotiate the purchase, which was finally effected in 1877. The buildings with all their treasures then passed entirely into the hands of the town.

It was not opened immediately to the public, for the work of restoration took a long time. They had to rescue, to dig out and replace the fragments of art which were heaped in ignominious forgetfulness in bye places, or scattered about in corners like castaway rubbish. And it was not till 1880 that they were able to throw open to the public a museum unrivalled in the world for its rarity and historical interest.

But although the rooms are now open to the public the collection is by no means completed yet. The work of restoration still goes on even at this day. I have it from members of the family still living that there are piles and piles of volumes in the garrets not yet examined, not yet lifted from their cover of dust; fragments of priceless wood-carving not yet restored to the place from which they were wrenched; pillars, pilasters, and balustrades lying unpaired and unused about the floor, waiting for the good time to come when they may be suffered to assert their dignity, and hold their own. It may be some time yet before this desired end may come, for the Belgians are a deliberate

people and not at all disposed to spoil their work by too much hurry. The front of the house as it now stands is of modern date, quite plain, and with nothing to indicate the rare treasures it contains. But the corridor once passed, and entrance gained to the hall on the right, the visitor becomes sensible of another air and moral atmosphere. Everything assumes a strange form and style ; the hearth alone excites wonder by the strangeness and oddity of its appearance. It has porcelain bricks at the back and sides, and primitively shaped dogs to hold the large logs of wood which should warm the room ; while, placed to defend the wall behind, are metal plates representing raised figures, the unmistakeable culprits of Eden in the act of banqueting on forbidden apples, and for their sins left there to fry in effigy.

We passed into the office where the workmen had their names registered, and were paid their wages. The balance is still there, where the money was weighed previous to its payment. The book lay open, where their claims were jotted down, and the rude ink bottle where the pen was dipped; but the pen itself was gone, which one would like to have seen. Little pigeon holes, hung up against the wall, next attracted my attention as belonging to the past, for they are no longer seen or used in any office that I know of.

From thence into the long printing room, where indeed the wonders begin. The printing presses are ranged in two rows down the sides, leaving a wide space in the middle for free passage to the workmen and superintendents : each printing press, commencing from the lower end, being an improvement on the last. Here we see portions of books begun, but never finished, side by side with the manuscripts from which the printing was being copied. As we were led from one room to another, our astonishment rose in proportion to the luxury of art more and more displayed on every side, in the storied pictures, cabinets, carvings in ivory, wood-sculptures too, and other treasures lavished on an establishment where work was constantly carried on. And this in a measure and with a taste of which we of a later date, and in more civilised times, can have but little idea.

Thence we were ushered into the room where proof sheets were corrected, some of them lying there unfinished; as if the corrector, interrupted in his task by some public disorder, had gone out to see, and never returned.

In an adjoining room the proof sheets were ready to be pressed into their vellum covers to form books. Here also is the foundry where types were cast; the rude furnaces and simple appliances bearing testimony to their age. The moulds, the vessels for holding the molten liquid, the quaint queer bellows, the files, the crucibles, and a quantity of other instruments lying about exactly in the place where they seem to have been suddenly abandoned by the workmen a hundred and fifty years ago. The lamps too of the rudest contrivance were still older and must have existed, one would think from

the days of Plantin himself, all standing out on a zigzag hold from the wall asking to be filled. The tables, stools, too, all just as they were left.

There are libraries lined with books in old vellum covers suggestive of untold lore and legends of times we wot not of. Apartments occupied by the family, for it appears Plantin lived in his establishment. And here we could in a measure follow the habits and customs of his day—not expending their measure of luxury in details anywhere—not in nicknacks or little conveniences such as we, of modern days, have come to consider as necessaries of life; but largely and grandly in that gorgeous style which marked the old Flemish taste of the period, and which befitted a place visited by Royalty and frequented by all the princes and nobles of the day. Rich carvings on every door and lintel with a finish which no modern art can surpass and scarcely rival. Every balustrade, every corner, panel and window, even the dado round the room, is carved and sculptured. The rafters which, after the fashion of the day, were left bare to view, are laid in rows as regular as the rungs of a ladder, all finely cut and rendered smooth, with here and there a graceful acanthus leaf to vary the monotony of form, bending in soft outlines over the wood work it seems to grasp, as if meant to perpetuate that exuberance of fancy which sought to beautify whatever the hand may touch. From this we learn of what mettle the workmen were made in those days; how cathedrals were built and pulpits carved; and how honoured the men who were called in to give importance and beauty to places of public resort; men of mind, who stamped on every inch of their work their own mark of thought and genius, and sent messages to posterity to say how they too had faculties, and had used them. Oak must have been plentiful in those days. We find it used for the commonest purposes, and in every nook and corner standing out, black as ink, testifying to the age of the wood and the age of the work upon it.

There are rooms hung with veritable Gobelin, one of them imitating so closely the leaves of the horse chestnut and thistle, that I could almost have grasped it with my hand. The colours too are surprisingly vivid considering their age. However, the flesh tints of the figures have faded, thereby proving the fugitive nature of Gobelin's crimson.

In other rooms again, stamped Cordova leather hangs along the sides with quaint large showy patterns.

Elsewhere I marked the walls lined with silk, mounted on wooden frames, such as were in use a hundred and fifty years ago.

There is a room for meeting, I suppose, of ministers and authorities who may have come here to examine the publications, whether to censure or approve.

There is one room which goes by the name of Juste Lipse, the celebrated Dutch philosopher and intimate friend of Plantin, to whose

grandson he was tutor. This great man's works were printed and published here.

There is the dining-room, where the family dined and Princes banqueted. Also Madame Plantin's private apartment with a four-post bedstead elaborately carved, and its curtains of antique stuff looped up in deliciously prim festoons to the tester; the quilt also, which, as folks say, was worked by that illustrious lady herself some three hundred years ago. Here also is the sculptured prie-dieu on which she daily knelt before a large-sized engraving of the Crucifixion, very valuable it is said; a sculptured press where the lady stored her neatly folded linen, and other things of similar interest and value.

Near this, again, we are introduced to the children's room, with a curtained alcove, where the two little girls were wont to nestle at night after they had said their prayers at the mother's knee, and received her evening blessing. This curtained alcove interested me, for I have noticed the same contrivance in remote corners of Flanders and in forgotten nooks in Wales.

Adjoining here again is a room devoted to the spinet, such a one as would rejoice the heart of lovers of antique instruments. The notes are of ivory and number but one octave only, while the strings stretch out ad infinitum and in the wildest system of spinet manufacture. I did not stay to ascertain the age of the spinet. But it could not have belonged to Madame Plantin, as in her time spinets had not been invented. Virginals, I believe, were then in use. It must have been made at a later date, a hundred and fifty years ago, when last the place was inhabited by the possessing family.

But the greatest wonder to me was the room where the bibles and illuminated missals are kept under long glass cases.

There are illuminated bibles written by the hand long before Archbishop Ussher divided the Sacred Writ into chapter and verse; and, indeed, long before printing was invented. One of them bore the date 900.

Here also the great, grand Polyglot Bible ordered by Philip II., and to obtain which the directors of our own British Museum have vainly offered large sums. The illuminations of this and the other bibles are exquisitely beautiful, in design, colour, execution and finish. And long and eagerly did I linger here to take in what of it I could, but our party were waiting and I was hurried on to other parts. The walls of this long room were covered with works of art—Rubens, Vandyke, Jordaens, Boschaert, Vandenbrack and others, figuring in brilliant and precious form so as to complete a most valuable picture gallery. These were collected by that Balthazar Plantin in 1629 who revived the establishment by his activity and sumptuous taste for art.

There are two cabinets here of elegant and elaborate workmanship, the designs much too wonderful to escape my memory, even among so many objects of overwhelming interest, and a clock of the same

style and make, given to the family by a member of the House of Austria. I never saw a more exquisite scroll design.

There is a room filled with woodcuts, all kept under glass—letters large and small intended for ushering in an especial chapter; heraldic devices, armorial bearings, patterns, scrolls, frontispieces of most graceful design; all cut in the blackest oak and all drawn and designed by the greatest artists of the day.

The etching room is no less wonderful and interesting. Both copper and proof, side by side, ranged in the same fashion and equally guarded under glass.

Then the engraving room—a museum of treasures in itself, such as no sum of money could purchase. The only engraving Rubens ever executed is seen in this collection.

Also a room dedicated to the diplomas given to the founder, where among the rest are letters from Philip II. and the Duke of Alva. And here, hung up against the wall, is another precious document, containing the written regulations for workmen and the tariff of their wages.

Neither must I forget the shop where books were sold over the counter; not open to the street like vulgar boutiques; but gained by a handsome street door and up stone steps flanked with balustrades in keeping with the rest.

Even the paved courtyard possesses an interest and charm of its own, and delivers its individual message from the day when it was planted, they say, by Plantin's own hand. An ancient vine, black as ink, and, although 300 years of age, still gives out vigorously rich leaves and tendrils in the spring, and a wealth of grapes in autumn.

This is, after all, but an incomplete sketch of a museum unique of its kind, and so rich in interest that perhaps no attempt at description could do it justice.

A catalogue has been printed and is sold on the premises; and to its pages I must refer such visitors as may be induced through the perusal of these lines to visit the latest and greatest wonder of Antwerp.

MARCELLA F. WILKINS.

THE STORY OF A SELL.

ONCE again in England!

From my earliest boyhood, I think, the passion for exploring unknown lands has been the ruling desire of my life. For pleasure, I have ransacked Egypt, followed up the mighty Herodotean stream, struck across Abyssinia years before King Theodore had been heard of, and *failed* in an attempt to navigate the Yang-tse-Kiang from the sea to its source in Central Asia.

But *now!* I had done much more than this. I was a real discoverer, laden with priceless knowledge, dug from the ditches and wrested from the sandy deserts of Persia. Layard had made himself a noble name from his antiquarian discoveries at Nineveh; had not Smith, of the British Museum, won reputation by exploring the origin of the Bible and camping in the veritable Garden of Eden? Monsieur Botta, I knew, had created a European fame by his Ninevite discoveries of "Cuneiform inscriptions." All this I knew well, and it was this that had impelled me, ten years before the present date, to lay aside aimless flittings to and fro over the map of the world, and settle down into one single exploring feat, which would add to the increasing pyramid of knowledge, and make its author known to all ages as one of the great discoverers of the Nineteenth Century.

Yes, I had declared to myself, "Babylon and Nineveh have been found again! But there remains another capital of ancient history, hardly even so much as heard of by the ordinary reader, but perhaps in magnificence surpassing both." Known to the student of Herodotus and Polybius, yet its site at that day a profound mystery, I was determined to probe to the depths the secret of the seven-walled capital of ancient Media, with its palace—the palace of the just and stern Deioces, one of the greatest rulers of history—whose tiles were of silver and whose pillars were of solid gold. In a word, I had set out ten years before to discover Ecbatana, and here I was in England once again, a triumphant victor—I believed—in the fight against oblivion, and sand, and desolation.

The London, Chatham, and Dover Railway might seem at first sight to have nothing much in common with the ancient Assyrian Monarchies. But on that particular day, when my feet once more trod the platform of Victoria Station, I had intrusted all my Medo-Perso-Assyrian treasures to a common luggage-van and a first-class carriage on that favoured line. The luggage-van held my boxes, crates, bags, and impedimenta of large size, containing not only my personal belongings, but all the relics I had thought fit to bring with me from the regions of the Tigris. As to the first-class carriage, that contained—beside myself—my manuscript, written from day to day,

and which actually comprised my whole tale of work done and discoveries made during the eight years in which I had continued my Persian explorations. It made a bulky roll of paper, and I had swathed it round in so many wrappings that it had the appearance of an infant mummy from the land of the sacred Ibis.

I had rattled across Europe as fast as I could, after disembarking at Brindisi from Alexandria. Feverish anxiety had taken hold of me, now that my task was really completed, to place the results of my patient toil, and the toil of hundreds of native workmen, in the hands of a first-rate British publisher. Through the printing-press was my road to immortality, as I knew. No wonder I treasured up that roll of manuscript.

Well, my plans were all elaborated before I reached Dover. Somehow or other the Eastern traveller, on first arriving in his own country, expects to be received with honours, such as would have surely awaited me from all the Sheiks of the neighbourhood in any Persian town through which I passed. But the Sheiks of Dover treated me with profound indifference, and I and my precious treasure were left to be whirled up to town without—*as yet*, I thought—any public recognition of the greatness of the feat I had performed.

My plan was, to go straight to a well-known publishing firm with my manuscript, even before presenting myself to my aged mother and the other members of my family. My publisher I fancied I had chosen with great skill. I knew he was the head of an equally famous firm who had recently issued a book dealing with Ninevite antiquities entitled "The City of Jonah." Human nature, and the laws of commercial competition, would of course prompt him to desire to publish another work of original researches, dealing with another portion of Persia—that which I had explored. Why should I not call it "The Tomb of Alexander"?

I confess I was proud. Not in vain had I toiled personally, up to my neck in sand, and in the "rains" as deep in mud, in Persian trenches, in underground galleries and caverns. Not in vain had I superintended armies of lazy, contemplative, quick-witted Asiatics. Not in vain had I squandered my private fortune on Persian deserts. Now I should become renowned! I knew my knowledge was new, solid, precious. My book had cost me eight years of "original research." It was the condensed essence of Discovery. It was a mine of unique information, which I longed to spring on the learned world of Europe.

You can imagine how, feeling all this, all my previous life seemed merely a preparation for that journey from Dover to London. Every step of that journey seemed eventful. The prosaic scenery became poetical. There was a romance about the railway stations. The porter at the terminus seemed more than human. Was he not taking the treasures of Assyria to the cloak-room?

Such were my thoughts when I found tickets being taken, and I

was cast adrift on a London platform. Holding my precious bundle of manuscript in my left hand, and my right clutching the umbrella which I had *not* used in Persia, but had bought in Paris, I rushed to the van whence my luggage was being ignominiously shot out. The treasures of Deioces were hustled about with scant ceremony. I found a massive gold capital—one of my greatest prizes—for which I had had a special portmanteau manufactured, on the point of being pitched head foremost out of the van. I stopped that sacrilege, had all my numerous packages collected—ten in all—and followed the porters to leave the station and hire a cab. I fancy the guard treated me with a good deal of extra attention; so did the porters. My luggage was enough to supply the wants of an Eastern Potentate on his travels.

Pardon my dwelling on such details, but every slightest event at that moment is of importance to understand what follows. I had seen the first load properly adjusted, and wheeled off towards the cab-rank, and was waiting to convoy the second and remaining truck-full, when I suddenly remembered that in a fit of abstraction, or the hurry and bustle of getting the other things out—I had placed my priceless manuscript on the top of the first batch of boxes. Off I set to follow the first porter, rushing down the platform at express pace, and bumping up against one or two hapless passengers. By some mysterious process I got entangled in all the labyrinthic passages leading from the booking-office through the waiting-rooms to the exit, and lost sight of my porter for at least a minute.

At length coming up with him, I found he had met with an accident. He had contrived to spill most of the packages on the ground. There was not much damage done, however, and he quickly picked them up again and placed them in his truck. But the small sacred bag—the precious manuscript—the fruit of all my labour, was gone!

I did not take long to find this out. Decision of thought and action are learned from a traveller's adventurous mode of life. One search through the parcels and boxes and that was enough. There were the trunks, bags, wicker hampers of Persian make, and a peculiar sort of huge portmanteau with a large loose flap at the side for holding the Turkish "fez" or other cap, but large enough to hold a modest outfit. All these which I could more willingly have lost, were perfectly safe. But where was the roll of wrapped-up manuscript in its little bag?

Gone! In my frenzy I rushed back to the carriage thinking that my memory might have misled me; I might possibly have left the missing treasure in my compartment. But no; I remembered distinctly and without doubt that I had actually placed it—idiot that I was—on the heap of goods on the top of the truck.

I rushed back. I collared the porter, forgetting I was in free England, and demanded where my bag was. I believe I accused him

of stealing it. No wonder the fellow looked grumpy and threatened to report me to the station-master. The station-master! There was an idea. In two seconds I was before the official, had told him my tale, and demanded that every entrance to the station should be surrounded to prevent the thief escaping. I should have done that in Persia. Unhappily for myself, I was in a different country now.

The station-master smiled, was polite, made a note of the occurrence, said he would communicate with the police, took my name and address, but could do no more.

I felt dazed, confounded, thunder-struck. In my darkest moments of despondency—and such moments fall to the explorer as much as to any man in the world—I had never dreamed of such a calamity occurring. I just remember paying the porter something, and having a cloak-room ticket thrust into my hand. Mechanically I glanced at it. It was for "ten packages." If my manuscript had been there, there would have been eleven!

It seems to me, looking back on the event from the calm distance of some years, a remarkable thing that I took my loss so quietly. The occurrence which I have just described occupied so short a time to enact that in ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour at most, after discovering the disappearance of the precious bag, I was out in the streets, wandering about London.

I had no object in life, now. That was just what I felt. But I felt it only in a dull, stupid kind of way. My thoughts, which had been so painfully vivid at the moment of my calamity, and had embraced past, present, and future in one wide landscape of gloom, was now all but stagnant.

I found myself sauntering vacantly along the side of the Thames. The Embankment had been begun and finished since I had last seen England, yet, as far as my recollection goes, I did not even notice the fact of there being any difference. In a dull and heavy manner my imagination floated round and was tied to my manuscript bag, and refused to leave it. I had always been an ardent politician, yet the fact that the evening papers of that day announced "Resignation of the Ministry" was a matter of profound indifference to me.

My loss had stunned me. There may be some who will account this a selfish state of feeling. But it is human nature, after all, and I hope nobody else may be placed in so miserable a position as I occupied at that moment.

I sat down on one of the public seats on the Embankment, and watched the penny steamboats. How long I sat there it is impossible for me to say, but it must have been a considerable time, as it was morning when I arrived in town, and now darkness was advancing with strides. A youth—a typical Londoner of the lower ranks—who sat down beside me in an intoxicated condition, and volunteered to use my knees as a footstool, finally aroused me from my lethargy. I rose and walked away.

Then a mist seemed to lift off my mind, and I thought clearly. What should I do? My life's labour was lost, and I concluded *not* to visit a publisher. My "Tomb of Alexander" might wait now. It would never be a literary rival of "The City of Jonah," for the simple reason that it would never be published. Besides a rather treacherous memory, I had no other materials whatever to work on, so as to reconstruct my tale of exploration. Beyond a doubt, the ten years of study, of danger, of toil and privation, cheerfully borne because of the unfailing solace of a great hope—all were thrown away.

Back to the East once more!

Thank Heaven, I had recovered my wits and my manhood. But I had been utterly unable, with the weight of my loss on me, to visit my family and friends. I had left London—accursed city of my tribulation!—behind me on the very night on which I arrived in it.

Yes, I was off to Persia again, determined to count the past ten years simply as a dream, and to begin my exploring work all over again.

When I got to Brindisi my mind was sufficiently recovered from its shock to understand that I had acted foolishly in not offering a reward in England for the recovery of my bag containing the manuscript. I set that matter right by telegraphing to my London agents to immediately advertise a reward of £100. I might even yet recover the treasure, but it was such a forlorn chance that I decided not to wait, but to push on to my destination—my deserted trenches and quarries at Ecbatana.

Every step of my journey, however, was inexpressibly melancholy to me. The Mediterranean was simply *haunted* by the recollection of the bounding hopes and dreams of fame with which I had steamed along it a few weeks ago. I felt quite ten years older. Age was creeping on me, and a terrible blank had been created in my life. I was as one who had lost a dear friend. Still, I nerved myself for the coming struggle; I would conquer, I would yet publish my work, I would wrest fame from envious fortune, though at the eleventh hour!

It was in this mood that I found myself at Alexandria. The canal was not yet quite completed, so we had to go the old land route to Suez. I stood on the landing stage watching my mass of luggage being disembarked.

I had brought it all back with me. These, at all events, I had said to myself, shall not be lost. And I had mentally determined, when *next* I reached England, to carry back with me, double and treble the number of relics and valuables of Medic history that I now possessed.

One by one the fateful ten boxes and packages were hauled up out of the luggage boat and deposited at my feet. I could only muster up a languid interest in their safety. Nevertheless, I thought it best

to remain and see that they were not unnecessarily knocked about by Egyptian porters.

It seemed fated that my baggage should meet with accident. Some of the packages were certainly heavy, and that may account for it. This time it was a portmanteau that came to grief,—the one which I have mentioned as being made with a loose pocket at the side, to contain a cap or "fez" if required. Of course I severely lectured the clumsy boatmen who were responsible, though no actual harm had been done. It was only a fall of a couple of feet that the portmanteau had, and nothing of great value to me was packed inside it.

Then I turned to leave, after giving exact orders as to carrying the baggage to the railway station at once. I thought, however, that I would just count the boxes and bags to make sure they were all there.

There ought, in the natural course of things, as I said before, to have been ten packages, and ten only, since the loss of the eleventh, the manuscript bag. I ran my eye listlessly over them, and suddenly became perfectly petrified with astonishment. No other word will express it. I was rooted to the ground like a Druidical stone. Every faculty I had was concentrated in the absorbing one of complete, unmitigated surprise.

There was the manuscript bag! It was lying at my feet, quite quietly. I expected it suddenly to vanish, but it did nothing of the kind. I stared at it, and it seemed to stare back at me. Instead of clutching it immediately I was so convinced it was unreal and only hollow mirage and mockery, that I turned away, and walked a few paces off, to bring myself back to my senses.

But when I moved back to my former position opposite the luggage, I could deny the fact no longer. The Bag *was* Here! Then I seized it with feverish hands, opened it, tore the myriad wrappings away from the roll inside, and my precious, my beloved, my toil-won manuscript was pressed to my heart!

How it got there is easily explained. The wretched little bag must have slipped down in the spill which took place at Victoria Station, and secreted itself by chance in the loose pocket of the portmanteau. As there was nothing in that pocket, I had not been careful about fastening it, and consequently the flap was loose. By an inconceivably bad piece of luck, my sacred manuscript fell into that identical pocket, and lay unnoticed.

I have called this the story of a "sell," and a "sell" it was to me. But a sell which writes wrinkles in the forehead, and sows grey hairs in the beard, even of a strong man, may be quite as bad, while it lasts, as a bonâ fide misfortune of the good old-fashioned type.

HOPE AND DESPAIR.

All upon a summer sea
Sailing in an argosy—
  Rebecs, lutes, and viols sounding,
  While the ship o'er wavelets bounding,
Skims the surface of the sea.

All the masts are wreathed with woodbine,
Jessamine and eglantine;
  Whitest lilies—reddest roses
  Strew the deck in scented posies;
And the cordage is a vine.

Sunlight gleams in golden meshes;
Breaks the foam in pearly tresses,
  Through the interlace of flowers—
  Breaks the foam in silver showers
All adown the golden meshes.

* * * * *

Stealing down a gloomy river,
Where dull water-grasses quiver,
  From a barque come sounds of sorrow,
  Never ceasing with the morrow—
Mournful barque upon the river!

Cypress, rosemary and rue,
Branches from the sombre yew,
  On the deck are withered lying,
  While the night-breeze, sadly sighing,
Wafts the odour of the rue.

Sullen clouds obscure the moon,
Darkness cometh all too soon!
  Black the clouds and black the river,
  Black the barque, and oh! the shiver
As it sinks beneath the moon!

E. D. C.



ROBERT BARNES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"MISS AGATE," SAID THE VICAR, AFTER A LONG SILENCE, "IS IT EVER TOO LATE TO DO A GOOD THING?"

THE ARGOSY.

DECEMBER, 1882.

MRS. RAVEN'S TEMPTATION.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "DR. HARDY'S MARRIAGE."

CHAPTER XLV.

CHARITY HALE.

THE early sun of the winter's morning was beginning to shine upon the room and upon the excited group assembled in it, discussing matters big with the fate of the House of Raven. The Reverend James Connell waved away the paper his son would have pressed upon him. "Wait a minute, Philip. Don't tell me anything else yet. This is a letter written by my poor brother-in-law to Frank while he was at college—and it seems never to have been delivered."

Philip was instantly attentive. Not that he imagined his own discovery was the less urgently important of the two. "Where did it come from?" he asked.

"The post-mistress brought it up herself," the butler answered. "It was found inside the floor in her shop, sir, when the alterations were begun last-night."

"One does not know what may be in it," mused the Vicar. "Frank must be allowed to see it as soon as possible.—But it is not likely to contain anything bearing on the present crisis of affairs."

"Probably not," decided Philip. "But the discovery that was so absorbing me when the letter came in, most distinctly does bear on the present. We have but just begun to feel an interest in the existence and fate of this third sister of the Hale family—the scarcely known Isabella Hale; and for a long time we have been sedulously seeking to trace Madame Allebasi Elah, the 'Oriental Mystery.' Look here!"

Once more he held up the blotting-paper between the window and the group, so that the writing showed through it, and therefore could be read backwards. They could all see the words "elaH allebasI." And thus the secret stood suddenly revealed.

"This Madame Elah, or Isabella Hale, is sister to Mrs. Charity Hale, still a trusted resident in this house, and also sister to one

Salome Hale—mother of the man Eldred Sloam, who is by repute the son of Squire Eldred Raven, the bachelor uncle of the late Squire," said Philip. "It seems to me, that the first thing we have to do is to see Charity Hale, and question her."

"We must speak with her at once, certainly. You need not wait, Mr. Budd."

Charity obeyed the summons readily. She was beginning to think that with Hester Walker, whom she recognised, and Mr. Dewe (of whose early interviews with Mrs. Raven she was perfectly well informed) both in the Court, it was high time for herself to speak out. She looked the very model of the old-fashioned servant, wearing almost ostentatiously every badge of servitude—cap, kerchief, apron, and short, full skirt; she curtsied, too, as she came in.

The Vicar's indifference and antipathy to her suddenly developed into full consciousness of itself. Good heavens! had the conventional virtues of her position half-blinded him to the fact that her eyes were crafty eyes, and that her lips were cruel? As Charity sat down she looked around, and saw that the fateful hour had come.

"Mrs. Hale," began the lawyer, "we are obliged to inquire into various things just now. You must not object to answer a few questions; and you must answer all, however unimportant they may seem to you, as carefully as possible. If your memory fails you, say so. Now, I understand you had a sister named Isabella Hale. Is she still living?"

"She is, sir," said Charity, quite coolly.

"You had another sister, once?"

"Yes, sir," answered Charity. "My sister Salome, who died."

"You must pardon my asking," said Mr. Dewe, "but do you recognise any relationship between yourself and the man Eldred Sloam?"

Charity hesitated for a second. "He's no more related to me than he is to the family at the Court," she said drily.

"To go back to your sister Isabella. Does she live near here?"

"She moves about, sir. I see her when she is near."

"Did she not pass by the name of Madame Elah, and act sometimes as a fortune-teller?" pursued Philip.

"Isabella's ways have never been my ways," answered Charity.

"That second child of your sister Salome's?" said Mr. Dewe. "Is it still living?"

"It is not, sir. It was a girl, and she lived to grow up, but she has been dead for years."

"Then, as she is dead, are we to regard her history as closed?"

Charity smiled. "That's as you please, sir. People may be dead, yet may have lived long enough to leave children behind them."

"You mean that this child of your sister Salome's left a descendant. Such descendant of course is in the same relation—or no relation, as you please—to you and the Raven family as this unfortunate girl, Evelyn Agate——"

"Gently, sir," said Charity, trembling with eldritch glee. "Maybe

this child is related to us all, the Court people and me too. There's wonderful magic in a certain bit of paper, sir. It may be a marriage certificate!"

Everybody was listening with strained attention. Mary Davies lifted her head. "You must not waste our time," said Mr. Dewe, severely. "The only inference that I can draw from your observations is that you believe, or wish us to believe, this younger and last child of your sister Salome's to have been born in wedlock?"

"That is so," answered Charity, with some excitement. "I hold the marriage-lines between Salome Hale and Eldred Raven. She was a good sort of a girl, like a lady; yes, she was, though misfortune did overtake her; aye, and nearly killed her. She ran away after the boy Eldred was born, to escape more ill; and the Squire went after her and found her in London, and they were married at once. But it pleased the Squire to keep the marriage secret, and she did the like at his wish. Yes, he repaired the damage as well as it could be repaired; but it couldn't undo it. I hated Squire Eldred then, and I hate him now," she added vindictively.

"Hush, hush!" said Mr. Toynbee; "he is dead. Mrs. Hale, do you know who or what it is that has passed in this neighbourhood as the ghost of Squire Eldred?—the figure that has been seen in the fields?"

"Aye," said Charity. "I've known all these years that Eldred Sloam, sore with being cut off from what he half feels ought to be his rights, has covered many a wicked way with the semblance of the dead Squire. It was an excellent semblance to hide in," she added bitterly, "for Squire Eldred living had not been so loved that any would care to encounter Squire Eldred dead. Once put an idea into people's heads, and they'll make ghosts out of gate-posts," she concluded, with her accustomed cynicism.

"Then do you know who are the figures seen only lately: the young man and the woman whom popular fancy was speedily turning into your sister Salome?"

"Sir," said Charity earnestly, "I want to know that as much as you can. It's my belief that Isabella knows; and I've a notion that whoever they be, they are not to her mind, and their walking is none of her plan. It's my opinion, also, that Eldred Sloam knows more about them than he will say. That time when he was hurt, it seemed to be more than a fright he got. I think it was a blow."

"Did you ever see Eldred Sloam himself in his ghostly disguise?"

"Only once," Charity answered. "That was the night before Mr. Frank went to London. Eldred brought me a letter from Isabella that night. It was the first time I had heard direct from her for years. For we had quarrelled over the use we should make of those marriage-lines of Salome's. Isabella and I never did agree very well."

"Then that letter was carried on the night when Miss Cleare saw the figure in Ash Lane!" thought Mr. Connell.

"And now, Mrs. Hale," said Philip, "can you not give the slightest

guess concerning these two figures? Is there anybody whom you suspect of being either the man or the woman?"

Charity shook her head. "I've sometimes fancied the woman might be Miss Evelyn. But I've not the least idea of the man."

"But, Mrs. Hale," said the lawyer, "since you knew of Squire Eldred's tardy marriage with your sister Salome, why did you not at once put in the legal claim of her younger child?"

"We did not know it then," answered Charity, who on these points seemed anxious to give all information. "My sister Isabella came across the marriage-record in a city church, quite accidentally, years and years after Salome's death. It was only just before Master Frank was born."

"You are leaving us to infer that Mr. Frank Raven is the son of your sister Salome's youngest child," said the lawyer. "Is that so, according to your belief?"

"Yes. He is the son of Mrs. Agate: she who was called Marian Snow, and was the lawful daughter of Squire Eldred Raven. Isabella had a good friend in London, a wealthy lady who was childless. She contrived to get this lady to adopt poor Salome's baby, the little Marian. This lady educated the child well, and when she grew up she married Theodore Agate."

"Then, when you at last got to know that Salome was married, why did you not declare it?"

"Salome's child was a girl—we were not sure whether a girl could inherit, and I stood out for waiting. You need not hurry to cut down sound timber—it keeps on growing; and the true heir, Frank, was in the Court in his own place. It was something Mrs. Raven herself said which put the notion into our heads. She knew it did; and I and Isabella laid our plan. Mrs. Raven never thought from the first that Master Frank was her own child—I am sure of that."

"Mrs. Hale," said Philip, "did you ever, from some place in this house, remove a red intaglio ring?"

Charity's face flushed, and then paled. "I took Squire Eldred's ring that my sister might give it to his grandson. I'd grudged seeing it on the late Squire Henry's hand, though I loved him. Yes, I did. And Mr. Leonard did not attempt to wear it. He seemed to know by instinct that it wasn't his right to."

"Well, Mrs. Hale," spoke the lawyer, "I don't think we need detain you longer now. All you have said to-day will have to be repeated in a more formal manner. And you must understand that you are not at liberty to leave this house.

"You needn't be afraid of my going away, sir," said Charity. Mr. Dewe gathered his papers together. He would at once see his client, Evelyn, and then take up his abode for the time at the White Hart. Mr. Brackenbury, the family solicitor, had been telegraphed for the previous evening, also Miss Cleare.

"I want to see Cran," observed the lawyer, standing ready to take

leave. "It is odd how this woman Elah has evaded him. Good-day for the present, gentlemen. I should advise that the late Squire's letter to his son Frank, which has so strangely turned up to-day, should be shown to him as soon as he is well enough to receive it."

He opened the door as he spoke. There was a slight hesitancy in his doing so. On the outside somebody else, at that very instant, was turning the handle the other way. It was Budd, who did not stand back for the lawyer's egress. There was that in his face which made the lawyer stand back for him.

"Mr. Leonard is just gone, sir!" he said solemnly, addressing the Vicar, who seemed to the worthy old man the sole representative of order and authority now remaining. "He went off easily—in a sleep—only this last minute. Mrs. Raven was in his room."

CHAPTER XLVI.

IN THE FIRELIGHT.

LEONARD was gone. They took the poor mother to her own apartments. She had bent down and kissed the cold cheek of her eldest-born, scarcely less responsive now than it had often been in the days of health and life. Then she submitted to the guidance of her attendants, and had followed where they led her. So she sat in her great arm-chair in front of her wide cheery fire; her thin hands folded in her lap, her figure shrinking together, a look of age and feebleness seeming to steal over her. Janet went in and out.

Hours went by. There were subdued sounds of coming and going in the house below. And once and again Nurse Hannah assured herself that her remaining patient was still sleeping peacefully with a hue of health stealing back upon his face. And kindly hands of old dependents spread Leonard's death-chamber with snowy drapery, while good Budd stripped the scant blossoms from the wintry greenhouse to strew them over his dead master; and, as he went about his pathetic task, he said to himself, "Thank God, it is not for Master Frank I am doing this!"

Frank awoke with a strange sense of refreshment and restoration. It was some time before his mind regained full consciousness of all that had lately happened. But when it came, the recollection was very vivid. How still the house was—how strangely still! And Leonard? And then Frank knew Leonard was dead—knew it he knew not how; but with a knowledge as sure as if he had just seen his brother's departed spirit in that mysterious kingdom of sleep from which he himself had just returned.

Silently he arose and dressed, in spite of bodily weakness. He felt his feet falter in their tread, and his hands tremble in their action, and he realised that he had been very near the gates of death. But he thanked God that he was yet spared to live.

He opened his door gently, and peeped out. Nobody was astir in the corridor; but by a light thrown across its shadowy length, he knew a door was open—the door of Leonard's room.

He went towards it. He felt quite sure of what he should find. No person was there but the maid-servant, whose heart was half-broken for the death of poor James Sloam. She was helping Budd with the flowers, and he had gone back to the greenhouse for more.

Frank would not disturb her. He went on, downstairs, and opened the door of the drawing-room. A strange atmosphere of warmth and brightness met him. A huge fire was burning on the hearth. A solitaire tea-set, recently used, stood on an occasional table. For there was somebody seated in the great easy-chair, and so swallowed up in its soft depths that as he came up behind he could see nothing but the simple folds of a black dress. As his foot fell noiselessly on the thick carpet, his heart gave a great bound and told him who it was. Alice Cleare.

She started to her feet when she saw him—alarmed for his sake.

"Mr. Frank," she cried, "how is this? They believe you are in your bed, sleeping soundly. Do sit down and rest while I go and tell somebody."

Frank sank into the easy-chair. He suddenly dared to realise how weak and shaken he was, just as we often dare first to admit how tired we are, when home and rest are in sight.

"Don't go away," he said appealingly. "Do not be frightened. I have been very ill, but I am better now. And I know about poor Leonard. I have seen his room. When——" his voice faltered.

"This morning," she answered gently, standing at his side. "This morning, before I came."

"I am so glad you came!" he murmured, without question then of how or why. "Is anybody else here?"

"A gentleman—a Mr. Brackenbury—came about the same time that I did. Your Uncle Connell and Mr. Philip are with him now."

"Philip is here too, then?" observed Frank, without any expression of astonishment: he was too weak to feel surprise then. "And Mr. Brackenbury? Was it Leonard who sent for him?"

Alice only shook her head. She must not tell suddenly of James Sloam's death, and of the suspicion hanging over Evelyn Agate.

"My poor—— Leonard's poor mother! Where is she? Who is with her? She loved Leonard very dearly."

"Don't say loved," whispered Alice. "Love goes on, always. It is because I am so sure of that that I can be what you call brave."

"All seems so strange!" murmured Frank, dreamily. "This room looks so pleasant, I feel as if I had awakened to new life. I think I have heard that sensations of this sort are common after sharp illnesses. And yet how cruel it seems that I can feel so just now."

"We must remember that life for your brother, as the doctors think, could never more have been worth living," said Alice gently.

"We must think of death as coming to him like a friend, to release him from pain and darkness."

"I have often thought of death as a friend," Frank observed. "And I think perhaps death is always a friend—friendly when he comes for us—friendly too, when he stays from us."

They sat on in silence. And then Alice said, "I must really tell your uncle and Philip that you are up," and left the room.

Alice found them both in earnest consultation with Mr. Brackenbury. Philip suggested that Miss Cleare should show Frank at once that stopped letter of his father's, allowing more painful events to wait until the morning.

"It will be rather hard to secure his ignorance on these points," said Mr. Connell, "now that he has left his room."

"Oh no," Philip answered hopefully; "that letter will absorb him for some time. Let Miss Cleare kindly sit with him till he goes back to rest, for I'm sure he must need to be kept quiet, and then I will go with him, and mount guard. After a night's sound slumber he will be fit to hear everything."

Miss Cleare did not refuse the trust they reposed in her, and on returning found Frank sitting by the fire, just as she had left him.

"Is that letter for me?" he asked, seeing that she carried one.

"Yes," she said; "but there is something to be said about it before I give it to you. It is a letter which has been long delayed. It was lost in the post-office, and only found now by an accident. Mr. Frank"—she spoke slowly and gently—"it is a letter from one between whom and yourself it seemed that the last earthly word had passed. It was written by your father to you while you were at college. Budd says it was the last letter he ever despatched. And she laid it reverently in his hands.

Frank opened the letter, and Alice sat aside, not to profane the sacred confidence between the dead father and the living son. The room was so quiet that the ashes falling in the grate almost made her start. Suddenly Frank sprang to his feet with glowing face and beaming eyes.

"It is all right," he cried—"all quite right for ever now. Read it, Miss Cleare, true and good—friend—that you may rejoice with me!"

"My dear boy Frank,

"I have heard reports that your life at college is not what I should like. I heard this accidentally, in a railway carriage, discussed by those who did not know who I was. I heard that you frequent billiard-rooms and bet largely, and that you have on hand sundry transactions with money-lenders. I should have come straight off to you, but that I am very poorly, and laid up in my room here at the Court. I know how foolish young men are, and I scarcely expect denial from you, or even explanation; but I do hope I shall find genuine regret and determination to shake yourself free from all such

courses. I have a great faith in what you may become: for, Frank, if you were not my own boy, and I, therefore, likely to be partial, I should be inclined to prophesy great things for you. So I have made up my mind at once to save you from your present self, by the fullest exercise of my authority. I shall not write you another cheque till I get from you a complete statement of your affairs; and in order that this wholesome restraint should be continued in the event of anything happening to me, I shall make a new will, by which you will inherit absolutely nothing during your mother's lifetime. Understand that this will is only provisional. If you *can* offer any satisfactory account of your conduct, the will shall be destroyed at once; and even if you cannot satisfy me now, it shall be altered immediately you settle into a steady line of life, and apply yourself to your studies. It is no kindness to you to allow you to throw away your fine fortune and prospects. I shall keep them safely for you. I have sufficient trust in the real goodness of your nature to feel sure that years and experience will bring you wisdom and rectitude, and you will thank me then. Take care what friends you make, Frank. Our own conscience is always the most sure of a hearing when it has an audible echo outside ourselves. I hope you will find that some day in a good wife, my boy. All I ask for in the daughter I hope for, is that she be a true, good woman and lady. Granted so much, you will have wealth and position sufficient for both. God bless you, my son; I feel I am not so young as I was, but I should like to live to see you settled. May you never want at least one heart to love you as honestly as does

"YOUR OLD FATHER.

"P.S.—There can't have been any mistake about your identity; you were described as 'young Frank Raven, son of a great Squire below Standchester—second son, but likely to be the heir in the end.' The men seemed to know all about you. Of course, I could put to them no question."

"I see where the mistake lay," said Frank. "These men, whoever they were, made it themselves. There was a fellow named Craven in our college, a thoroughly fast man, and in the fastest set. I was never introduced to him—I don't even know what was his Christian name. But his initial was F., for on more than one occasion dunning letters for him were brought to my rooms by mistake. These men confounded us together, tacking F. Craven's character to Frank Raven's history. And how this must have worried my father! Probably out of kindness to me, he represented his confidence in my ultimate self-recovery far more strongly than he felt it."

"Yet he does not represent it so strongly as I think he would, if he were with us to-day," whispered Alice.

"And I think God answered his wish for me," said Frank—"indeed, I know He did, so far. But has He answered it altogether, Alice? We shall never again have my father's very presence so

visibly brought before us, as it seems in this newly-opened letter. With it lying before us, may I take your hand and say, 'Here she is—true woman and brave lady, who will be your boy's audible conscience all the rest of his way on earth?"

It was Alice who was trembling now. Frank stood firm and erect in the strong energies of an enthusiasm which had dared to throw the die that must decide his destiny. Alice did not speak. But she needed not, for he held her hand, and she did not withdraw it.

Something she murmured: "Your people — Mrs. Raven ——" But Mr. Connell and Philip came in. The former was far too absorbed in the bustle of affairs to notice the sudden glow of spiritual atmosphere about him. Philip looked from one to the other with a comprehending glance, and was aware that Miss Cleare had suddenly become "Alice." And Philip grew very grave and dismal, and took cynical views of things.

The Squire's letter was shown to them, and they glanced at each other with a sigh of relief that this at least opened no other avenue of mystery, but rather set an old pain at rest for ever. Philip worked off a little acerbity on the idle and heedless gossip which had caused the misunderstanding.

"And so my mother and the girls will be crossing the Channel by this time," Philip presently remarked to Miss Cleare. "Did they start from Coltburn before you left it?"

"Oh yes, I saw them off," answered Alice; "and I think the change will do Louisa real good. The very thought of it seemed to revive her."

"It is strange how she should have become such an invalid," mused Frank. "I remember I thought what a pleasant picture of health and beauty she made when I first saw her at the Coltburn railway station."

Philip felt that the talk was drawing near dangerous ground. He sprang up, telling Frank it was time he went to rest. "There'll be some beef-tea and all that ready for you in your room. And by your leave, old boy, I am coming to sit with you for a spell."

At that moment, Budd brought in a note for Mr. Connell. He read it hastily, hesitated a moment, and then saying, "Philip, I should just like one word with you alone," beckoned him from the room.

"Good heavens!" thought Philip, following with alacrity. "I was casting about for an excuse to give that youthful pair a chance for a lover-like good-night, and father goes and does it as a matter of course. Is this a special intervention of Providence, or is it the native shrewdness of the old gentleman?"

But his father's face was grave. "Read that," he said.

The brief note was from Mr. Dewe.

"We have secured the woman, Isabella Hale. We got her at Eldred Sloam's cottage, and she is now under surveillance at the White Hart, where I am also. She is very communicative, and we shall get a full statement from her to-morrow."

"Yes," said Philip readily, "it will make a more satisfactory ending to the story I have to tell Frank. But we'd better go back to him at once, and I'll take him off."

He opened the door, with a prolonged though slight rattle of the handle. Frank met him just within it. Alice Cleare stood on the hearth—her foot poised on the fender-stool. Her cheeks were aglow. Was it all with the light of the fire?

"You are scorching your face, Miss Cleare," said Philip.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE WITNESSES.

Among the letters which arrived next morning was one for Philip from Gertrude Agate. She had had telegrams from Mr. Dewe, but no letter from Evelyn herself. Evelyn had made no communication to anybody. Mr. Dewe gave forth no report concerning her. Indeed, he could have said little, except that when she had been informed of Mary Davies's presence in Ravenstoke, and of her newly-revealed relationship to herself, Evelyn had peremptorily desired that Davies might be kept out of her sight.

Gertrude Agate seemed to find it rather hard to realise that there could be any actual danger hanging over her adopted niece. But she was keenly conscious of the pain and shame inflicted on the girl.

"And after all," she added in her letter, "I may be able to come to Ravenstoke. Such a marvellous change has come over my poor brother Theodore! Yesterday morning I took him his breakfast and his newspaper, as usual; and when I went back to his room in an hour's time, I found him a new man. Mr. Connell, it was like a miracle! 'I have waked from a hideous dream,' he said, 'and now you must take me out into the streets, Gertrude. I want to look on my fellow-creatures' faces.' And we went out together—I, in fear and trembling; but he was so bright and kind, and noticed all the changes that have taken place in these twenty years. But he hadn't touched his breakfast, and the newspaper I had taken to him had vanished somewhere. Of course I made no remark about such trifles, lest he might feel irritated at being watched. Theodore has never returned to his chamber, save to sleep. He is sitting in my parlour, reading, while I write this. A sad thought steals over me—is this sudden change for the better a precursor of death? He said to me yesterday, 'Gertrude, do you remember my knocking for you very impatiently one evening last autumn? I thought the voice I heard then was like Marian's.' The voice must have been Mr. Frank Raven's.

"Oh, it is being borne upon me as a conviction, that that young man is my brother's stolen child. A wild dream of the sort flashed on my mind the first time I saw him, he put me so much in mind of Marian: but these are things one may not mention lightly."

"I must telegraph to her that she was right," said Philip, passing the letter to Frank, who had now heard of all that had happened.

The coroner's inquest was to be held in what was called the "Board-room" of the White Hart—to wit, a long apartment, where the Guardians of the Poor usually met. There was a tiny room, which opened off it, and would afford a suitable refuge for the witnesses. And there, one after another, they were led, while the jury went to view the mortal remains of poor James Sloam.

Mrs. Sims was the first witness called. She came forward, tearful, but important. She testified that she had been in the Court service for many years, and had known the deceased from his infancy. Recollected Christmas Day last. The deceased had brought a wine-glass and a decanter from the dining-room to be washed. Had not washed them. Put them aside. Had handed them over to the doctors, and believed them to be the same now produced. On the day following had made some strong soup for Mr. Frank Raven. Made it with her own hands. The basin was sent back, its contents scarcely touched. She told the boy James to finish the soup, thinking the waste a pity. James was taken ill shortly after, and continued in great suffering till his death. All the servants had always been kind to the lad; he had not an enemy in the world. Miss Evelyn Agate saw him on his dying-bed. She did not show any particular emotion.

The medical and analytic evidence followed. The doctors detailed the dead boy's symptoms, and those of Mr. Frank Raven. The post-mortem examination had detected large quantities of a certain drug—well known on the Continent, but little known in England—a poison whose effects so simulated natural illness that if carefully administered, with no suspicious surroundings, medical men themselves might be easily deceived.

Frank Raven himself was next called. He came forward, looking wan and pale; as was to be expected. He was asked first about the events of the 26th, since the immediate business of the inquiry concerned James Sloam's death. The previous events of Christmas Day could be only gone into now, as bearing upon this.

Frank said he had come down late to his lunch. He had been asleep and had not heard the bell. He did not take his soup because he had little appetite, and it had grown cold. He had been ill the day before, after taking a glass of wine.

"Did you take it yourself," he was asked, "out of the decanter?"

"It was poured out by Miss Evelyn Agate. She advised me to take one as we were walking home from church: she thought I looked ill."

"Did she go into the house before you?"

"No," he said. "I think—I think we went in together—straight into the dining-room."

"She poured out the wine in your presence?"

"Yes."

"Now, about the day after Christmas. Can you recall who it was brought in your soup?"

"It stood on the table ready for me."

"Did you take that meal alone?"

"Miss Agate seemed to have finished before I came down," said Frank, and further questions put to him elicited the following answers. "She was not seated at the table. There was nobody else present. Immediately after I sent away the soup I went to my own room. There I sickened again, and I remember no more for many hours."

"Can you remember any incident of that luncheon time—any remark you made to Miss Evelyn Agate? Did you not complain of something in the room?"

"Oh," cried Frank, suddenly recollecting; "I remarked there were some patches of dust on the floor, as if somebody had come in without scraping his shoes."

"May I ask what was the nature of your brother's last seizure?"

"My brother had cried out that he saw a face at the window. The doctors believed this to be an hallucination—common to the disease he suffered from—especially in its more dangerous developments. But he might have seen one: the curtains were not quite closed."

"It is believed that your brother's first seizure originated in something he saw. Is that so?"

Frank hesitated in his answer. There could have been little, he thought, in the sight of a man and woman in a lane to induce Leonard's sad condition. He inclined to the medical belief—that it had been gradually coming on, and that sudden excitement had brought it to a crisis.

"You were aware that a detective has been living at the Court?"

"No: but I am aware of it now."

The next to come forward and give her name was Hannah Cran.

"I am the wife of ex-detective Cran. Am employed by him in the business he was set upon at Ravenscourt. Among other things, I was instructed to find out about an alleged ghost. Found that said ghost the common talk of the neighbourhood."

And Mrs. Cran went on to give further evidence in detail.

"Had never seen the ghost herself. Its later appearances seemed to have been first mentioned by some fortune-teller early in the autumn. Believed that woman was now in court. Gossip soon arose in the village as to other strange people seen about the Court grounds. Had full instructions to act in these matters. Got to believe that Miss Evelyn Agate was concerned in them. Had seen a paper on which was written: 'To buy betrothal ring for Evelyn Agate.' That paper was in Mr. Frank Raven's possession. Had, in consequence, kept her eye on Miss Evelyn Agate's movements. Had found that she was in the habit of going out in disguise late at night, after the Court doors were closed. She went out by a small side window. Had secured her disguise. It could be produced: was a green dressing-gown. The young lady, Miss Evelyn Agate, had been anxious to leave the Court on the day after Christmas Day. Knew

the man Eldred Sloam, father of the deceased. Had never seen the person who had kept house for him during his illness. Had scarcely heard of her."

Cross-examination by Mr. Dewe further elicited:

"That the paper on which Evelyn Agate was named, was kept in Mr. Frank Raven's writing-case. People in her line of life had to do their duty the best way they could."

Alice Cleare was next called—the lawyers explaining to the coroner that in the interests of justice it was desirable to prove that some person or persons unknown were in the habit of haunting the Court grounds. Mr. Dewe went on to say that the name of Miss Evelyn Agate had been too hastily brought forward, but that she would have an opportunity of vindicating herself as a witness, when she might have important evidence to give.

Alice Cleare had little to say. Had met last autumn a curious looking figure in Ash Lane; it had startled her in the moonlight. Had afterwards seen this same figure at Coltburn, in the Connells' garden at midnight. Mrs. Connell had also seen it. Knew that anonymous letters and messages were sent to Mr. Frank Raven while at Coltburn. Knew that he found a packet, meant for him, in a vase in the drawing-room. The packet contained a sum of money and a written paper. Did not see what was on the paper. Knew there was a fortune-teller in the town at the time, and that these mysteries were generally attributed to her."

Questioned by Mr. Dewe, said she did not think she had seen this figure on any other occasion. Knew a young man named Marco Learli, who had visited at Mr. Connell's house.

Mary Davies was called, but proved little, save what was already known.

The next witness was Eldred Sloam. His stalwart figure and very handsome face made him a marked contrast to the weary and careworn woman who had preceded him.

He stated that the deceased, James Sloam, was his son. His wife, the boy's mother, was dead. He had seen him in his usual health on the morning of his death, and knew nothing more of his proceedings till he was summoned to his death-bed. Miss Evelyn Agate was there too. She did not seem much put about. Knew Isabella Hale —believed she sometimes called herself Madame Elah. Had known about her, off and on, all his life. She was related to his mother. Had carried letters for her to Mrs. Charity Hale. Had been in Coltburn last autumn; went there at the request of Madame Elah, who was also there. Had done some business for her. Declined to say what that business was. Knew who it was that the people called Squire Eldred's ghost. It was he himself. Had never tried to undeceive them. Might have tried to encourage their belief. Knew who and what he had seen on the occasion when he hurt his leg. It was somebody who had no right to be about the Court. Declined

to say who that person was. Did not know where he was now. Had just seen a person called Mary Davies. Knew her when she went by another name—Hester Walker; but should not have recognised her. Knew Miss Evelyn Agate as Mrs. Raven's companion. Isabella Hale had been staying at his cottage while he was ill: she had often gone out after dark, hoping to see a certain person, but had always failed. That person was the individual in struggling with whom he had hurt his leg. Yes, it was a young man, not an old one.

A sensation now ran through the Court. A slight, elegant figure robed in deepest mourning, the face concealed by a heavy crape veil, was being led in. It was Mrs. Raven. Her voice was almost inaudible. More than once she had to be told to repeat her answers.

James Sloam had been in her service about a twelvemonth. She was not told of his illness till after his death. Miss Evelyn Agate had been in attendance upon her as usual until that afternoon. It was by her special request that Miss Evelyn Agate went downstairs to lunch the day after Christmas Day; she had said she wanted no lunch and would rather stay with her. That was before the lunch-bell rang. She had been with her all through the morning. She had heard of the ghost seen about the Court precincts. She had seen the figure so described.

"More than once or twice?"

To the best of her belief, three times altogether: but she had never seen the two figures said to walk about lately. She saw the fortune-teller who had visited Ravenstoke, she who was at the Pitchfork in the autumn. She had gone to her there, to get her to leave the neighbourhood. The woman had left it immediately. Had received one anonymous missive herself. She found it in a locked drawer in her boudoir. It was written on her own note-paper, and she had locked the drawer herself, and had never parted from the key in the interval. It was the fortune-teller who told her to look for something there. She had destroyed the paper. It annoyed her. It related to the man Eldred Sloam. She interceded with her son to allow him to remain on the estate, after she received this threat. Miss Evelyn Agate answered an advertisement she put in the papers for a companion. She had seen Miss Evelyn Agate before, but Miss Evelyn had never seen her. She had seen Mr. Theodore Agate many, many years ago, before her own marriage (the answers came in a whisper). He was tutor in a house where she was guest. She only knew of his domestic misfortunes within the last year. She did not even know until lately that he had ever married.

There was a pause. Then Mr. Dewe asked, "Where did you first see the person who was called Squire Eldred's ghost?"

"At Ravenstoke, in the dusk."

"And on the second occasion?"

"In my brother-in-law's garden, at Coltburn," she said faintly. "It was at night, the others had gone to rest. I had been writing,

and was then sitting at my window, and I saw this figure crossing the garden. I believe it turned away because it saw me."

"Did you utter a cry—a shriek?"

"I did," she admitted.

"Now will you kindly tell us about the third occasion?"

"It was on the next night. I sat up at my window to watch, keeping out of sight. I sat so a long while. I think I must have dozed at last, for suddenly I started, and there was this same figure crossing the garden as if coming from the house."

"That must have been Eldred Sloam," remarked Mr. Dewe. "Did you give any alarm, madam?"

"No, I think I fainted," she said wearily. "I remember nothing more until I found myself lying on the floor."

"And again you mentioned nothing to your friends?"

"No," she repeated. "I began to mistrust myself. I thought I might be going mad. I thought so still more later when my eldest son's illness originated in a similar incident."

"You think he saw nothing in Ash Lane?"

"If he did see a man and a woman, there was nothing in them to frighten him, I should imagine. But I feel sure that his last attack was really brought on by seeing a face suddenly appear at the window. He was very weak, yet I believe that was no hallucination."

"There are sundry family matters which may call for legal investigation presently, I understand?" said Mr. Dewe.

Mrs. Raven bowed her head, and was permitted to withdraw.

"Mrs. Charity Hale!"

Forward came Charity. But most of her evidence has already appeared. She admitted that she had been in league with Isabella, and had placed the written-on sheet of paper in Mrs. Raven's drawer.

And the climax of interest was reached when the next witness was called. "Madame Elah, or Isabella Hale."

There she was—the tall, strongly-built woman, with the dark face, from which, nevertheless, even the heavy foot of years, laden with low intrigue and base ambition, had not trodden out every vestige of the beauty it had once possessed.

"Your description, if you please?" said some official civilly, as he took down her name.

"I am a mesmerist: a single woman; age sixty-five—no settled place of residence," she answered coolly.

"You know the family at Ravenscourt?"

"I am a relation of the new Squire's—of Mr. Frank's," she said in a clear, low voice.

This answer was allowed to pass. "You have been in the habit of concerning yourself with different members of this family?"

"Yes," she said quietly; "and I had a personal interview with my own relation, Mr. Frank Raven."

"Never mind that. You knew the deceased, James Sloam?"

"Yes—well."

"You sent anonymous letters to Miss Gertrude Agate in London?"

"I did," she answered. "I had reasons of my own. I held a strong interest in the girl, Evelyn Agate, and I knew she was forming an undesirable connection."

"Can you tell us who that undesirable connection was?"

There was a slight hesitation. "I can. It was a young man whom she met at the house of Mr. Connell, of Coltburn."

"What was his name?"

"Marco Learli—an Italian. I knew him myself. He was no friend of mine, but he was willing to be useful to me."

"How came he to be so devoted to your service?"

She looked round, and answered with deliberation. "I knew certain secrets of his, and therefore I could make it worth his while to do for me what I could not do for myself."

"What was the last service he rendered you?"

"He paved the way for depositing a message and gift for Mr. Frank Raven in Mrs. Connell's drawing-room."

Mr. Connell whispered eagerly to the lawyers, evidently suggesting some of the questions which came next.

"Did the first attempts to do this fail?"

"Yes. Eldred Sloam, going to the house by night, found the windows fastened, and he said a lady in a white cap was watching him from an upper window."

"And the second attempt succeeded?"

"Yes."

"How did the man get access to the house this second time? After one alarm, such as that of the night before, were not the doors and windows fastened?"

"Yes," she said, quite coolly; "but during the previous day Marco Learli had paid the Connells a visit. I sent him late in the afternoon, after the windows were likely to be fastened. He came away once, without accomplishing his errand. But he returned and got one window unhasped. He, Learli, knew not why I wanted it done; he did it solely at my request. Eldred Sloam's ingress afterwards was quite easy."

"And then, I suppose, you allowed this miserable foreigner to vanish? And you vanished too, didn't you?"

"I went away," she answered. "Eldred Sloam returned straight to Ravenstoke. And there on one of his night-walks he met Marco Learli."

"And you did not approve of any acquaintance between Marco Learli and Evelyn Agate?" said the lawyer.

'No."

"Did this man, Learli, follow Miss Evelyn Agate to Ravenscourt?"

"He did."

"And found means of access to her?"

"He did," she replied again. "After that, he went away for a time, and I thought he was gone for good."

"Did you know he had again put in an appearance some little time before Christmas?"

"Not till it was too late," she replied significantly.

"Do you know where he is now?"

"I do not," she answered. "I have given the police every information in my power. I can do no more."

"And, speaking to the best of your knowledge and belief, had this man Learli a grudge against Mr. Frank Raven?"

"He had."

"May I ask on what that grudge was founded?"

She gave a silent laugh. "I had heard him curse him in his own language. He was wild with mad Italian love; he felt that young Mr. Raven stood in his way with Miss Evelyn Agate."

"But did Miss Evelyn Agate ever lead him or anybody else to suppose that Mr. Frank Raven regarded himself as her lover?"

"No," she said, almost fiercely, as if angry with herself for being forced to the disclaimer. "But Learli knew that if Mr. Frank, the true heir to Ravenscourt, chose to become such, then he himself stood no chance with her."

The Coroner interposed, with some hints as to the laws of evidence.

"Did you ever know Learli to have poison in his possession?" asked Mr. Dewe. Madame Elah hesitated. "Not to my knowledge," she said. "But I have heard him boast that he had certain means of suicide always at hand."

"But you never saw poison?"

"No; only, a landlady of mine once had a cat injured by an accident, and I know Learli put it out of its misery with something he had in his pocket. It lay quiet as if insensible, had a few convulsions, and then died."

"Where did that take place?"

"At Sandgate: at the Three Fishes Inn. There are witnesses who can prove it."

"That will do for the present."

There was only one more witness to be called. And this was Evelyn Agate.

She came forward with a firm step. But how pale and haggard she looked! and what new lines were already graven on her face! Eyes glanced from her to Mary Davies, tracing the resemblance between the daughter and the mother. She was being examined at her own request, though warned that what she said might be used against her.

"I was the adopted daughter of a family in London, named Agate," she said, in answer to the preliminary questions put to her by the officials. "By answering an advertisement, I secured the post of companion to Mrs. Raven. I had met Mr. Frank Raven before. He was not at the Court when I first came to it. I believe I saw the reputed ghost in Ash Lane. I had seen Eldred Sloam earlier on that same evening. It never occurred to me that the two were identical.

I never told anybody what I had seen. I went to Coltburn with Mrs. Raven. Mr. Frank Raven was there. I visited a fortune-teller, Madame Elah, during my stay. I went with Mr. Philip and Miss Louisa Connell. I saw the woman alone."

"And she mentioned Mr. Frank Raven?"

Evelyn's voice did not falter. It rang out, hard and metallic. "She alluded to him. She spoke of him as my future husband."

"Did you first meet Marco Learli at Coltburn?"

"I did."

"Did you know he hoped to meet you again at Ravenstoke?"

"Not till after he had gone away. He wrote to me that he was there."

"Was there anything else in that letter?"

Evelyn hesitated. "Yes; he said that Eldred Sloam, whom he had seen in the company of Madame Elah, had attacked him and tried to frighten him from the neighbourhood, but that he had disabled his assailant."

"Were you and this man Learli walking together, on the night when the Squire went out to watch for you?"

"Yes. Though I did not think he saw us. I heard his cry and the thud of his fall before I saw him. We were not so very close to him. Marco Learli and I escaped through the hedge."

"You have seen Learli since that occasion?"

"Several times."

"But he left the neighbourhood, did he not?"

"Yes. When he came again before Christmas, I should have forbidden it if I could."

"Why?"

Her voice was low enough now. "He hated Mr. Frank Raven, and I feared there might be mischief if they met. I have thought lately that Marco Learli is—mad!"

"Was it Marco Learli's face at the window which startled the sick Squire on Christmas Eve?"

"I suppose so," she said, faintly. "He told me he had looked in, and had seen us all seated there."

"You met him that night?"

"I met him only to implore him to go away."

"Were you aware that Nurse Hannah watched you that night?"

"I believe she did."

"When did you see Marco Learli next?"

"At church on Christmas Day. I induced Mr. Frank Raven to return home by a private way to avoid him."

"You did not speak with Learli on Christmas Day?"

"No, not till the day after. He then told me that by keeping at the other side of a thick hedge, he had heard all Mr. Raven and I had said to each other returning from church; and that he had run on and been inside the Court before we got there."

"When did he tell you this?"

"Next day: he came to the window of the little room where I was sitting at luncheon alone, and stood outside talking to me. I was frightened. I begged him to go away, saying Mr. Frank Raven was coming in, and pointed to the soup on the table waiting for him. He would not go, and I ran upstairs, thinking he would go away when I was out of sight. When I came down again, he was gone. But I noticed that the room felt very cold, as if the glass-doors had been opened. When Mr. Frank came in, he drew my attention to the dust on the carpet, and then I felt sure that Marco had been inside the room."

"He had had time to tamper with the soup?"

"Yes," she said, in a low tone. "But if he did so, he was mad."

"You did not know that he carried poison on his person?"

"I never suspected such a thing."

"He said nothing to you then as to what he should be doing next, or where he should be going?"

"Nothing: he was terribly excited."

"Why did you not give the story you have now given as soon as you heard there was a question as to poison in the matter."

For a moment the hard young face quivered. "I felt how unfair suspicion could be," she said. "Why should I divert it to another? I would not have told what I have told now, but that Mr. Dewe informed me Madame Elah meant to say all she knew. If Marco Learli is innocent, and I can but think he is, surely the truth must come out. I was suspected, and I am innocent. If he is guilty, he is mad; and ——"

She broke down. Her examination was allowed to end there. The general belief in Learli's guilt was growing strong, evidence leading in that direction; but, under technical advice, the verdict given, was that James Sloam had met his death by poison administered by some person or persons unknown."

"We have managed to spare Mrs. Raven wonderfully," said Cran, rubbing his hands; "of course the question of the succession can be made almost a private family matter. And I've no doubt we shall find this Italian fellow. Madame Elah is doing her best to serve us. From what she says, it seems he's a Carbonari, or something of that sort, plotting against the French Emperor; it was her knowledge of these schemes of his which gave her the power over him. But he was very nearly one too many for her at last."

An affidavit, made out by the solicitors at the dictation of Madame Elah, and sworn to by her, ran in some parts as follows:

"My name is Isabella Hale. I was born in Sussex. My parents died early. I had two sisters: Charity and Salome. Charity went as an upper servant into the Raven family; Salome went also, later, and for two or three years I heard nothing particular of her.

"After a time, my sister Salome wrote to me, saying she wished to consult me about a matter of importance, and that she was not

friends with Charity, who would not go near her. (I have since thought that she might have meant to disclose to me the fact of her marriage; of which Charity was as ignorant as I.) I started off for Ravenstoke as soon as I could get leave from my employer—for I was in a milliner's show-room in London—and when I got there I found my poor sister Salome had been dead two days, leaving a girl baby. And I heard that there was also an elder child.

"On the morning of my arrival, Squire Raven was killed by a fall from his horse. I met the men carrying home his body. Up to that date I had been unaware of any intimacy between him and my sister Salome. It was all very dreadful. We had been well-conducted young women, superior to the class that go out as servants, and could but feel it as a blow. Charity came to me at the cottage. 'You shall take the baby away with you to London,' she said to me, 'and put it out to nurse there. You and I will pay for it between us —and if you don't like to help in the pay, I'll do it all.' I agreed to this, and took away the baby that same night. I had her baptised in London, and named her Marian Snow.

"As soon as it was discovered that I had a child in my charge at nurse, I became an object of doubt and suspicion at the milliner's. My story of its being my sister's was treated with ridicule. It was very unjust and it tried me—I was not hard-natured then. One day in the show-room, a good-hearted, pleasant widow lady, Mrs. Palmer, a customer, came in to order a bonnet, and saw me in tears. I told her a little, and she said I might call on her that evening after hours and tell her more—as I did. I gave no particulars about Salome; only that she was my sister and died, leaving her infant to the world. Mrs. Palmer once lost an infant herself, her only child; she grew interested in the little Marian, and finally took to her and had her educated. Marian was just leaving school when her benefactress died, leaving no will, and Marian had to go out as a governess. She was a sweet, charming young lady, with the well-marked Raven features softened down. Her son, Frank, is very much like her. I only saw her for years at a distance and by stealth, for I had gone my own ways, then, and did not show my face at Mrs. Palmer's.

"It was after Marian Snow's marriage with Theodore Agate, while I was seeking details of another matter, that I came across the marriage certificate of Eldred Raven and Salome Hale. It is in the church of St.——, in the City of London, and bears date only about six weeks after the birth of the unfortunate boy, Eldred. Afterwards was concocted the plot (through some words of lament dropped to Charity by Mrs. Raven) and carried out successfully, of substituting the baby (Frank) for her sickly child. Mrs. Raven's own child lived but one hour, and I myself buried it the same night in the churchyard.

"It was also I who made friends with poor Hester Walker; and, later, got her the place at Miss Agate's. The young lady who goes by the name of Evelyn Agate is Hester's daughter."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE NAMELESS DEAD.

Some dull days dragged on. No trace of the Italian could be found. But in the South Coast towns which he had frequented, it was discovered that the foreign drug which had wrought James Sloam's death was well-known to the druggists. An entry in one chemist's book—dated more than a year back—proved that Marco Learli had once bought some of it.

Mrs. Raven kept her room. She had received a severe shock. In the evenings she liked Frank and Alice to come and sit by her fire, and read and talk to each other. She did not encourage them to talk to her. The only person she spoke much with was Mary Davies, who chiefly attended on her. Charity Hale had left the Court for ever. At present, she and her sister Isabella were lodged in Eldred Sloam's cottage; the mysterious fifty pounds deposited with the Rev. Mr. Connell having been returned to Madame Elah to devote to her own uses.

Gertrude Agate had ventured to leave London with her brother, and had taken temporary lodgings at Ravenstoke. She was, by degrees, informing Theodore of all the story of past years—which should lead him up to the discovery that his lost son was still alive—the possessor of rank and wealth. Theodore's terror of human faces and voices had never returned: his mind had come to him "as the mind of a little child;" simple, perhaps, easy to be entreated and ready to believe, but clear, and bright, and active. Gertrude's own joy in Frank was more than could be told.

Mr. Toynbee saw Miss Agate in those days, as she went to and fro. "What a delightful woman!" he said to Frank. "Her presence should make amends to her brother for all." And that evening the Vicarage seemed a little lonely.

Mrs. Raven seemed to cling to Evelyn, in her poor, weak, broken way. "Stay with me," she whispered, "and your mother shall stay too. I shall leave this place of course, and make my home elsewhere. The past is ever present to me here, and that deceit that was committed. But, oh, my dear, it was such a temptation!"

But Evelyn did not answer then. She was restless and uncertain, always looking at the newspapers, as if expecting something to happen. And within a day or two something did happen—something which set all Europe by the ears, and which, by throwing Paris into a state of confusion and excitement, awoke very lively fears in the breasts of those who remembered several minor French revolutions, and were familiar with the horrors of the last century, and of the *coup d'état* which founded the second Empire. This event was no other than the Orsini plot against the life of Napoleon III. The thought of his English wife and children in the midst of a population whose temper

could not be relied on for two days together, threw the good Minister into a panic, and Philip Connell started off to bring his mother and sisters home.

Philip had never before been in Paris, and was only to remain there for one day. He wanted to snatch a glimpse of two of its wonders—those wonders which had fascinated the fancy of his boyhood. One was Nôtre Dame. That he saw, in all the gorgeous pomps of a Thanksgiving Mass. The other he did not see, because he could not shake off the embarrassing presence of "the girls," whom he was too true an Englishman to introduce to needless horrors. This was the Morgue. If he had seen that, he would have remembered the sight to his dying day. Not, perhaps, because it was crowded—though there were many violent deaths in Paris about that time—but rather because of one corpse, which he would certainly have noticed, since it lay last in the terrible row, a little apart from the rest, as if even the rude bearer had seen some especial stamp of passion and woe on the worn, clear-cut young face. Found dead on the steps of a public gallery, clutching a poison-bottle in his hand! That was all that was ever known about that nameless dead body. Nobody appeared to identify or claim it. It is true that the name of Marco Learli was on the secret list of conspirators to be hunted down at that time, but Marco Learli was never heard of afterwards.

And the Connells returned to England. And Louisa was better. The change had done her good. Only she herself was changed. Alice Cleare returned to them at Coltburn.

Philip alone went back to Ravenstoke, and there narrated his Parisian experiences to an indulgent group of listeners. He was great on the Mass at Nôtre Dame. He told of the crowds running, the people huzzaing, the waving flags, the booming cannons. One could not expect Evelyn to give heed to such chatter. But surely her face was not always so pale as it looked then—almost as pale as that of the awful corpse still lying in the terrible Morgue!

Perhaps Philip's narration somewhat prepared her for a letter which reached her a day or two afterwards. Perhaps she needed little preparation for it. There was no sign of woe about the outside of that letter. But within, the paper was bordered with deep black, and in a minute hand, simulating print, were the words "Marco Learli is dead."

Mute and pale as death, Evelyn showed that letter to Philip Connell. He respected the terrible blow that had fallen upon her. He asked no question, and they kept the tidings between them in silence. There was no more ambition for Evelyn. But ease and comfort remained, if she stayed with Mrs. Raven, and she thought much of those things.

"I will stay—I promise," she said.

CONCLUSION.

THE HAPPY LIGHTS OF HOME.

MIDSUMMER EVE. The trees about Ravenscourt are all in blossom, and here and there a genial breeze has strewn the ground with their summer snow. People are in holiday attire, and everybody's face is set towards the road from the station to the Court. Miss Wilmot and Mrs. Fisher stand in the portico of the White Hart and chat.

"Have you seen the new house lately—'The Rest'?—that's what I hear it is to be called," said the postmistress.

"What, do you mean the Convalescent Home, that is building where Eldred Sloam's old cottage used to be?" asked the hostess of the good old inn. "Yes; and when it's finished the sick folk will be thankful."

"Aye," said Miss Wilmot, "it was a blessed idea to build it there. The Vicar says there's nothing takes away a bad memory like a good hope. It was our bonny bride who thought of it. There will be good days now in the Court, I reckon."

"And I'm glad those Hale women and that Eldred Sloam are all gone," said honest Mrs. Fisher. "It was wise of Mr. Frank to send them out of sight of the places where they'd grown used to wickedness. It's a very quiet village where they're gone to, I'm told. I don't know whether they'll do each other good, but at any rate they won't do anybody else much harm. They'll have enough to live on decently—with not a penny over. I'm told they took it hard when they found that Budd and Sims had got pensions larger than their allowance, and the honour of keeping the Convalescent Home beside. Faithful servants they've ever been."

A shrill whistle broke the evening stillness, and the straggling groups came hurrying up to the roadside. A train was nearing the station.

Mrs. Raven had elected to make her home in France. Soon after settling in it, she had a paralytic stroke, which, slight as it was, touched her mind a little. She fancied after that, that Evelyn Agate was really her daughter, and petted her accordingly: and to Mrs. Davies she grew really attached.

The wedding had taken place at Coltburn. Mr. and Mrs. Connell could not have done more had the bride, Alice Cleare, been their own daughter. Philip went down to be best man. That was nearly a month ago, and now the bride and bridegroom were coming home.

"Here they are!" The whisper ran from every side, as the open carriage drawn by two pretty greys emerged from the station, while a soft, sweet chiming of bells sounded from the grey church tower behind the trees. Down the beautiful road, among the quaint heavy-eaved cottages, Frank and Alice drove, smiling to right and left. Frank's left hand fell upon hers, as they passed a certain point.

"This was where I first saw you, Alice!"

At the lodge-gate the carriage halted, because there stood Theodore and Gertrude Agate with the Rev. Jasper Toynbee: the brother and sister were now guests at the Vicarage. Frank stood up bare-headed. It was such a perennial mystery to him to feel that the grave, scholarly man with the long white hair and the eager eyes, was really his father, in the stead of that friend of his boyhood, the honest burly Squire, who slept among his ancestors in the Raven vaults. Alice rose too.

"Why are you not up at the Court? We expected you all to welcome us there," cried Frank.

"We have just come thence," answered Gertrude. "You will find 'welcome' written on everything. We grant you this one solitary evening as a great boon!" And the carriage passed on.

"We can't settle down to read this evening, surely, Miss Agate," said the Vicar, as they gained the Vicarage gate. "The sun will soon set. Let us linger in the garden."

But Theodore Agate could not be detained from his beloved studies, and went in. They sat down and lingered on.

"Miss Agate," said the Vicar, after a long silence, "Miss Agate, I am an elderly man, and you are just the right age for a woman! Is it ever too late to do a good thing?"

"Not if there is time to do it in," answered Gertrude, with a side-glance at him. He was poking holes in the gravel with his stick.

"I don't think we elders should be too proud to follow a good example because our juniors have set it," he went on, with desperate courage. "I don't want to separate you from your brother, Miss Agate; but he says he can't live in so large a house as the Court. Do you think—don't you think, now—that the Vicarage is just the right size for him?—And for you?"

And Gertrude confessed that she did think it—after a shower of happy tears.

It grew late—the little supper-bell had tinkled twice—before they went indoors. Turning to do so, the Vicar saw the illuminated windows of the Court gleam through the darkness of the trees.

"Look!" he cried; "see the happy lights of home!"

Gertrude looked. Then she, too, pointed her finger, raising it higher than his. Each gazed into the other's face. The stars were out.

THE END.

A SOLDIER'S CAREER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

FROM A RECORD OF THE PAST.

I DO not know whether the following sketch will prove of much interest to the general reader, since it refers to time and events that are past. The incidents related in it are authentic, though they savour strongly of romance.

In the year 1833, a handsome young lad of seventeen, whom it will not do to call here by his full name, went out to India as a cadet. It is his career—and it was but a short one—that is about to be told. He was a high-spirited, noble boy, though wild, thoughtless, and everlastingly in scrapes; and had caused his guardians no end of trouble and expense. But they could not help admiring the lad with all his faults; and his mother, while she would call him her unlucky boy, called him likewise her darling Harry. Henry Lynn was the name given him in baptism: there's no necessity to suppress that. He was the younger of two sons; and a profitable living, in the gift of the family, was destined for him. So, by way of preparation, the child, at nine years old, was sent to Dr. Bringemon's great academy in London, where he picked up notions quite at variance with those of his sober father and mother. At twelve years old, he had fallen in love with a soldier's coat, and told his sisters privately that they should never make a parson of *him*. At fourteen, ere the mourning he wore for his father was soiled, he wrote word home that he would be a captain in India. He was sent for to the Hall. His mother cried, his guardians talked of a birch-rod, but Master Harry held to his own will. He lavished love upon his mother, but he laughingly defied his guardians; and the upshot of the business was, that Henry Lynn G. was posted as a gentleman-cadet, and at seventeen set sail for India.

It would seem that he liked the life he found there, for some five or six years afterwards, when, by the death of his brother, he succeeded to the family estate, and it was supposed he would sell out and go home to enjoy it, he made no change at all; save paying off his debts, and launching forth into fresh expense—which he had been quite ready to do before. Few men were so universally liked as Harry Lynn. Impetuous, open-hearted, generous, and handsome as he had been in boyhood, so he remained in manhood.

Now, do you know much about that race of men called the Sikhs? Few do; save that they are people inhabiting certain tracts of land in India. Nobody had ever heard of them till about two hundred years ago, speaking in round numbers, when they came to light as natives

of Hindostan; a peaceful, submissive race of men, inoffensive as are our Quakers. Their religion was a mixture of Mahometanism and Hindooism, neither entirely one nor the other, which brought down upon them persecutions from the bigots of both creeds; and towards the termination of the empire of Delhi, these persecutions became so excessive, that the Sikhs were compelled to rise in arms against their oppressors. It takes but little, when once the train is laid, to change a peaceful race of men to one of cruelty: and the Sikhs were goaded to become such. They established certain chieftaincies amongst themselves, called Missuls, and, with time, rose to greatness. Some of them took possession of that portion of India which, being watered by the five branches of the Indus, is called the Punjab, or land of five waters; whilst other settled themselves on the opposite, or eastern, side of the Sutlej.

It is more than three parts of a century now, that the Sikhs of the Punjab, on the western side of the Sutlej, were first governed by Runjeet Singh: a man of great ability, who established his kingdom, called by the name of its capital, Lahore, on a sure foundation. But power begets the love of power, and Runjeet Singh cast his eye to the Sikhs on the east of the Sutlej, and thought he should like to govern *them*. His hopes were fruitless, for they had been taken under the protection of the British government; and, the chances of a war with that formidable power, Runjeet Singh knew better than to hazard. On the contrary, he entered into a treaty with the British authorities, which proved of advantage to both parties. Years wore on, and the kingdom of Lahore increased in importance. On the termination of the continental wars, when Napoleon was sent to St. Helena, numerous European soldiers, men and officers, passed over to India, and enlisted into the service of Runjeet Singh. Under the example and training of these brave men, the army of Runjeet Singh became almost equal to our own. It carried its conquests into Afghanistan, and amongst other provinces that fell before its prowess was the beautiful Vale of Cashmere, so celebrated in song. But Runjeet Singh died in the course of time, and, with his death, all the jealousies and ill-feeling of the Sikhs towards the British, which he had kept under, broke out with irresistible bitterness, and there was little peace in the Punjab afterwards. Not that these animosities and petty wars concern us here.

In the same year that Harry Lynn obtained his captaincy, he went about exploring the country. Amongst other places that he visited was Lahore, and when he left it he performed an exploit that officers have borne the character for being expert at, from a captain bold of Halifax and ghostly memory, down to those of our own times. He "ran away with a maid, who"—did *not* hang herself, but went with him to his quarters at Calcutta.

She was one of the loveliest creatures possible to be imagined: as some few men, then living at Calcutta, can remember now: but

that was no justification for the step taken by Captain Lynn. Her mother, a Sikh, had married one of those European officers who had joined Runjeet Singh's army, a handsome Frenchman, and this child, Agee, their only one, was strikingly like her father, so that her beauty was of the European, not Asiatic, cast. The Frenchman died when she was an infant, and her mother married again, a Sikh. All trace, nearly all remembrance, of the lady's early alliance was lost, and Agee was brought up in the customs, habits, and religion of her mother's land. During the visit of Captain Lynn at Lahore, he became acquainted with her, a lovely girl just blossoming into womanhood; a powerful attachment sprang up between them, and the result was—as I have told you above. Such was the history of the girl, and the particulars of the affair, as they became known, bit by bit, to Captain Lynn's circle of friends at Calcutta.

He enshrined her in a secluded home at Calcutta; he surrounded her with all sorts of expensive luxuries; he lavished every proof of affection upon her, save one—marriage. And that she could not now expect.

Yet this Indian girl must not be judged as we should judge one reared in our own land of propriety and civilisation. She knew not that she was committing any grave offence; modest, gentle, innocent in mind as she was before, so she remained. The very few friends admitted by Captain Lynn recognised this, and involuntarily accorded her a respect quite at variance with the position.

We must now go on to the autumn of 1845. In her Calcutta home, in a luxurious apartment of it, richly furnished with articles peculiar to an Eastern life, sat this young girl we have been speaking of, Agee. She was in evening dress, enhancing, if that were possible, her surpassing beauty. Her robe was of muslin sprigged with silver, silver ornaments were on her neck and arms, and were interlaced with her dark hair. Young and lovely, she looked fitted to adorn society: a nameless grace pervaded her presence, a sweet modest refinement shone forth in her every look and action. Poor girl! hers was an unhappy fate. Calcutta railed at her greatly, especially those ladies in it who had sisters to marry, and who would have given their heads to get Harry Lynn. None thought of compassion; it was all censure; yet she merited far more of the one than of the other, and she was very unhappy. She had not understood these matters when she left Lahore, poor maiden: she understood them too well now. Perhaps the consciousness was especially present to her this evening, for her pale, delicate features wore a look of pain, and tears gathered frequently in her eyes. The room was redolent of a sweet perfume, emitted from burning pastilles: it was open to the terrace, and the breezy fans intervening kept up a delightful motion. Outside, stretched at his ease on a large bench, his heels higher than his head, and lazily blowing clouds into the air from his cigar, was one of the

handsomest men in all Calcutta and in manners one of the most prepossessing—and the two don't always go together. You guess of course that it was Harry Lynn. He was quite as deep in thought as Agee inside, and it may be that his reflections, occurring in disjointed interludes, were, like hers, not agreeable, for a contraction, as of perplexity or anger, sat on his otherwise open brow.

"I was a fool—that's what I was!—and awfully to blame. I ought not to have brought her away with me or saddled myself like this for years. How the deuce it's to be broken through now, I can't see. By Jove! I shall be worn to a skeleton with all this planning and perplexity. I get no sleep at night for worrying over it.

"My mother writes me that it's time I married; and thinks me an ungrateful dog never to have run over to England. Ungrateful! no, no, not that, dearest mother: thoughtlessness was born with me, and will never leave me. It *is* time I married: in a year I shall count thirty summers, and a fellow gets confirmed in bachelor habits after that. I wish I *could* marry. Maria Grame is the dearest and loveliest girl I have ever known, but it's of no use telling the old Colonel I think so, till Agee's disposed of. Maria cannot know anything about her, that's clear, for she's too correct a girl to have listened to my semi love-making if she did. Wish I could make it wholly!"

Captain Lynn broke off for a moment to shake the ashes from his cigar.

"We might be married here; I would get leave of absence and take her to England: my dear mother's old heart would be delighted; and Maria—but where's the use of planning if one can't execute? *What's to be done with Agee?* I can't turn her over as one does a ballet-dancer. If I could see any way to send her back to Lahore, with a few thousands settled on her—but there's none to be seen. She would rebel at the first hint of parting, and as to force and stratagem—awkward both; and the end not gained perhaps. The worst is she's so innocent and unsuspicious, so different from this sort of thing in general, that there's no knowing how to deal with her. This all comes of my own folly. Devil take the cigar! it's gone out."

Rising, and throwing his cigar away, Harry Lynn stepped into the room, and spoke; his tone betraying somewhat of the irritation of his thoughts.

"Agee! how fond you are of those pastilles. The smell of them is quite overpowering."

"I will not light any more; these are nearly out," she answered in perfect English, for she had been an apt scholar under his tuition.

"Oh, light as many as you please," he returned, in a kinder and more careless tone. "I am going to dress."

"To dress?" she exclaimed.

"There's a party at Colonel Grame's to-night. I promised to be there."

She leaned back on the ottoman, her whole attitude bespeaking disappointment, if not despair. "How many nights—weeks—months have you thus spoken: leaving me to this home-solitude; to my dreary thoughts!"

"Now, Agee, don't be unreasonable," he remonstrated. "I am sure you, of all people, cannot complain of neglect. But society has also claims on me."

"It had the same claims when I was first here," she answered, mournfully, "and you did not leave me then."

He soothed her, but he evaded a direct answer, and strode out of the room. He was never otherwise than affectionate, though he had tired of her in accordance with the nature of man. When he returned, he was in full dress, and, wishing her good-night, left for Colonel Grame's, gaily whistling some bars from the last new opera that had found its way from our shores to Calcutta.

Agee sat on where she was. Musical instruments, on which she was a finished performer, were at hand, books in French and English lay on the tables; but she neglected all, and never moved from her attitude of despair. Late in the evening, a middle-aged woman, dressed in a fashion peculiar to Lahore, glided in.

"Ever thus, lady," she said, in their native language, "ever cast down! You would be better and happier in your own land than here; and—the time has come when you must indeed return to it."

Agee looked up with a deepening colour, for the words were peremptorily spoken.

"Listen!" cried the woman, earnestly, as she bent to her mistress. "This bosom pillowed your head in its infancy; you were the solace of this poor heart in your childhood, and when you left us, I thought it would have broken. Your mother died; and I, who felt more to you than she had ever been, set out to seek you. Far, far I travelled; through hunger, and thirst, and heat, and weariness; along plains of sand, over deserts, through rivers, across mountains; with no guide to direct me, save instinct—the same instinct that will take a bird to its nest! and when I was well-nigh wearied out of life, I found you. What motive had I, think you, except *love?*"

"Dayah!" cried the young lady, rousing herself, "I know your love for me. I know you have been to me all that a mother can be—more than mine was: that you have remained here in this strange land, away from ties and kindred, for my sake. I know all this."

"Then, remembering it, dear lady, you may be sure I would be silent for ever, rather than speak a word to give you pain. Yet I must say that word this night."

"Say on," she faintly cried.

"You have clung to this Englishman longer than is well. You——"

"Not so," interrupted Agee, her pale cheek flushing. "We shall cling to each other so long as our years shall last."

"No, no, lady," returned the woman; "he seeks to deceive if he says that. There is a fair girl of the north ready to supplant you; one whose eyes are of the beautiful hue of the heavens; whose hair is as sunny threads of gold. I have seen her. This very day, in public, he was by her side."

"What of her?" shivered Agee.

"She is to be his wife: it is no secret in Calcutta. And you, lady, will be put away, estranged from him more effectually than if you had never known him. It is their custom, these Europeans."

Agee did not answer. She rose and stood there, motionless and rigid. It seemed as if the woman's gaze, bent on her, had turned her into stone, like the Ægis of old. Was *this* the cause of his changed affection—that he loved another?

The attendant looked round, and bringing her face in closer contact with that of her mistress, proceeded in a cautious whisper:

"I have heard again to-day. The Sikhs waver no longer; they are united and determined, and the war is coming on rapidly. In three moons from this, lady, they will have possession of India."

But still there was no answer. It was as if the young girl heard not.

"The Akalio* are urging them on now," proceeded the old nurse, "so any thought of peace is fruitless. *You* must not stay here: the land will be over-run with blood, from one end of it to the other."

"You have had news?" asked Agee, at length. "Who was your messenger?"

"He who always is. He is true to me and swift. He returns the day after to-morrow, not earlier, for he must have time for rest. Leave this false Englishman at once, dearest lady; our people must not find you here with him. I will conduct you back to our own land; and let the two years you have passed out of it be blotted from remembrance."

A step was heard, and the speaker bent down her ear to listen. It was that of Captain Lynn, and she drew away as noiselessly as she had entered. Agee sank down, and buried her face in her hands.

It was for this then that the unhappy girl had followed him! It was for this she had relinquished her beloved native land, envying the very winds that blew towards it; her dearest friends; her fair fame, though she knew it not; her childhood's language—only to be cast aside for another; one to be as much loved and more honoured than she had been!

Captain Lynn came on, whistling; rather a habit of his. But his step was slow, and the tune—if it might be called one—was melancholy as the Dead March in "Saul." She rose in an outburst of

* Wandering Priests. A fanatic race of men, possessing unbounded influence in the Punjab, especially over the native chieftains.

passionate sobs when he entered, and throwing herself at his feet, wildly clasped his knees.

"Oh, send me not away from you!" she besought in agony. "This northern girl cannot love you as I have loved. Will she tend you in sickness—bear with your wayward moods in health?—would she give up home, mother, reputation for you as I did, and endure silently the scorn and neglect of the world?"

"Agee, what mean you?" he asked, in agitation.

"You are false to me!" she exclaimed; "you are about to turn me adrift that you may wed the fair girl of the north. I have not deserved it of you."

"Stay, Agee!" he interrupted. "Whence you derived this information, I know not. That my name has been coupled with this English lady's is, I believe, true: but it will never be coupled with hers again. From this night, I go to her house no more."

"More deceit! more deceit!" she wailed, lifting her hands wildly. "You are mocking me now!"

"No: on a soldier's honour. I have bid adieu to Maria Grame for ever."

The fact was, Colonel Grame, finding that the attentions of Captain Lynn at his house were daily becoming more particular, had that night intimated to him that, "under existing circumstances," his friendship with his daughters had better cease. Whether, when he lingered with Maria for a moment in parting, Captain Lynn had whispered a hope that a more favourable future might yet dawn for them, cannot be known: if so, he would not be likely to speak of it to the Asiatic girl.

II.

It was the following December. Captain Lynn had transferred his quarters to Umballah, where a great portion of the British army was now collected. Preparations were being made for battle, but much uncertainty was experienced regarding the movements of the Sikhs. Some days, news would be brought that they were about to cross the Sutlej; others, that they were crossing it; again, that they were retreating and would not cross at all. But these various details are not necessary to be given.

Captain Lynn, to his most excessive annoyance, had been followed to Umballah by the young Sikh woman, Agee—not to his quarters, of course, but to the town. He had peremptorily enjoined her to remain at Calcutta until his return. The old nurse or attendant Dayah, had accompanied her thither, and this woman never ceased to urge upon her mistress the expediency of her quitting any place that contained Captain Lynn. One evening she glided into Agee's presence, her face pale, her mouth compressed, and approached with a dread whisper:

"Lady, you *must* leave him now: the hour has come. A few days

will see him and his companions mown down: earth shall hold them no more."

Agee's lips turned white as marble.

"They are now crossing the Sutlej," continued the woman, in a still lower whisper, as if she feared the very walls would hear her, "an army of from sixty to a hundred thousand strong. What can their handful of British troops effect against it?—and that handful not yet conveyed thither."

"When heard you this?" murmured Agee.

"He came this evening: he is swift and sure of foot, and has outstripped the European news-scouts by some hours: but their great chieftain* will know it ere to-morrow's sun be up. He little suspects the fate that is in store for him! They are fine of limb, these northern soldiers, tall and straight; but ere long they must measure their length upon the earth. As the grass falls before the scythe, so must they fall before their fierce and powerful foe."

"And Captain Lynn?" shivered Agee, from between her bloodless lips.

"He must share the fate of his comrades—what should hinder it? Why, even did you turn apostate to your oath, lady, and betray to him what I have now told you, which you know you may not do, it could not serve him, he would still go to battle with the rest. You must escape with me."

But Agee, with an impatient gesture at the word "escape," turned away, and ventured forth into the night. Captain Lynn was leaving his quarters to join a carouse of some of his brother officers, got up on the spur of the moment, when he came full upon her, stealing up.

"You are on the eve of being ordered out to battle," she whispered. "You must not go."

"Not go?" he exclaimed, wondering what she was talking of.

"Sickness must be your excuse," she eagerly explained. "A man unable to rise from his bed, cannot be expected to go out to fight."

"Are you in your right mind, Agee?" he asked, laughing lightly.

"You would never leave the battlefield with life."

"Then I must die on it, child."

"You can make a joke even of this!"

"No, not a joke. Though that's a good one of yours about sickness. An Englishman does not know what fear is," he said, drawing himself unconsciously to his full height; "and for the chances of war, we must all share them, and trust to Providence."

"Dayah is curious in herbs and medicines," she persisted, in a despairing whisper, "many of our women are. A potion from her would render you incapable of marching with the rest: and to the world you would seem sick unto death."

"That's quite enough, Agee," he said, half peevishly, half laugh-

* Governor-General.

ingly. "You don't understand these things, child. And you promised me yesterday to leave this place! I was in hopes you were gone."

"You seem strangely anxious to harm my countrymen," she exclaimed, still reverting to the war.

"Not at all. I wish to my soul they were other than yours, but I must do my duty."

Thirteen of them were present; the ominous number; and they sat around the convivial table of night. Not with the luxurious appurtenances usual in polished Europe; the rich plate, the glittering crystal, the many lights: such things pertain not to a half-civilised land or to a time of war and tumult; but the gay jest, the sparkling remark, and the merry song went round all the same. Gallant, gallant officers they were, true-hearted Englishmen, in the flower of early manhood! And they knew not that the shadow of grim DEATH was upon them, his dart pointed at the heart of *all.*

"The information is so imperfect, so contradictory," observed Major Challoner, the only grey-headed man at the board: "if we lance the full tilt of belief into a report one day, it is contradicted the next."

"In my opinion our march will be useless," cried the handsome Lieutenant Bell. "I don't believe the Sikhs are coming forward at all."

"They dare not cross," burst forth the hot-headed young Irishman, Dan Ennis.

"I hope to goodness they may!" exclaimed little Parker, who had certainly got smuggled into the army, for he was under height, or looked it. "The glory of routing 'em right and left!"

"They may prove a more formidable enemy than we think for," remarked the cautious old Major who had spoken first.

"Not they," replied Harry Lynn, contemptuously. "An inorganised rabble never proves formidable. The wine stands with you, Henderson."

"For my part," resumed Major Challoner, as he thoughtfully filled his glass, "I think Sir Henry ——"

"Well, Major?" cried one; for the Major had brought his sentence to a standstill.

"What's that in the shade? There! by the entrance? Who's eavesdropping?"

Every head was turned round at the exclamation of Major Challoner. A figure, clad from head to foot in a long, black garment, with a cowl drawn over the face, if it had a face; in short, a dim, shapeless form, stood there in the obscurity.

"What do you want? Who are you?" roared out Major Challoner, in his mother tongue; indeed he could speak no other.

"Beware!" was uttered by the figure in Hindostanee; a language

familiar to some of them only; but the voice was as a strange, unearthly sound, ringing with startling distinctness through the depths of the room. "You sit here, mocking at the Sikhs, but know that the moment you march upon them you are doomed—doomed! They are crossing the Sutlej now, a hundred thousand strong. You will be cut off in your early lives; your fair British homes you will never see again: not one of you but will be struck down; not one will be left alive to mourn the rest! Pray to the Lord for your souls: as sure as that you go out against the Sikhs, your destruction cometh: and they have need of prayer who rush into His presence, uncalled by Him."

Surprise kept the officers silent. Lieutenant Parker, who had more ready bravery in him than many a man twice his size, was the first to start from his seat and rush after the form; others followed: but it was already gone. They looked outside, and could see no trace of it; but there were many ins and outs of buildings close by, that might favour concealment.

"What was it all?" cried Major Challoner, who had not understood a word.

"Oh, a trick of one of the fellows," said Henderson: "nothing else."

"I don't know," cried the young Irishman, dubiously. "I hate such tricks. I can fight a host of men hand to hand, and glory in it; but for these ghosts and warnings and omens, I wish the fiend had them all."

"Did you ever see a ghost, Ennis?" asked Captain Lynn, winking at the rest, for the lieutenant's superstitious tendencies were well-known in the regiment. "What are ghosts like?"

"Which of us was to die, eh?" cried Major Challoner.

"Every one of us," cried Bell, making a joke of it. "We had better have a batch of will-making, and go to prayers afterwards."

"All, eh? That's rather too good a jest," returned the Major.

"You and all, Major," nodded Quicksilver Peacock, as he was designated amongst his comrades, from the mercurial tendency he possessed of never being still. "By George! the black fellow, ghost or no ghost, must think we have got tolerable swallows! I should like to get at *his*, with my good sword."

"Thirteen as brave fellows as ever drew breath!" laughed Parker. "A pretty go if we are to make food forthwith for the vultures!"

"And sent to our accounts with all our imperfections ——"

"If you go on like this, I won't stop with you," interrupted the young Irishman.

They did go on; and enjoyed their laugh at him: but there was scarcely one heart, brave though they all were, on which the incident had not struck an uncomfortable feeling, a sort of chill. It was as if they had seen the shadow of death, which stalked on before.

III.

THE Sikhs advanced, unconscious of the mocking disbelief of their British adversaries, and encamped themselves before the gates of Ferozepore, an army sixty thousand strong. That they did not make themselves masters of the town was a matter of astonishment then, and will ever remain such.

By command of the Governor-General, Sir Henry Hardinge, all the troops that could be mustered together at Umballah, marched out to meet this force, and to succour Ferozepore. They were headed by the Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Hugh Gough, and were accompanied by Sir Henry, who, laying aside his dignity as Governor of India took upon himself a command in the army under Sir Hugh. The marches were forced, about thirty miles per day. Both men and officers endured all sorts of hardship and privation without a murmur: the most painful to be borne perhaps was that arising from the want of water, there being none to be found on the route. On the 18th of December, after some days' march, they reached the village of Moodkee about one o'clock at noon, and proceeded to encamp there, trusting the next day's march would bring them to Ferozepore.

But we civilians, in our peaceful country, talk as we may, cannot form any adequate idea of the hardships undergone by the soldiers in these Indian plains in time of war: the unconscious British trooper, who has never been out of his own island would scarcely believe in such. Long marches in the burning sun, over roads heavy with sand, which, flying in the eyes, goes half-way toward entailing blindness; or trailing painfully through the tangled jungle and brushwood, with no water, no refreshment, to cool their parched lips. We know not what intense thirst is; the cravings of real hunger; the pain of continued and heavy toil. Sometimes, nay often, it happened, through this period of the Sikh war, that when the men had arrived at the end of their march, it would be two hours before the tents and baggage came up, and until they did come, there was no chance of refreshment. So the troops, all in a state of physical exhaustion, painful to witness, still more painful to bear, would sink down on the ground, utterly prostrated, beneath the burning rays of an Indian sun, or, worse still, under torrents of rain. Was it a matter of surprise that the hospitals were overflowing?

But to return to these men we are speaking of. They arrived at Moodkee, exhausted with their march and with physical privations, and had barely taken up their station before its walls, when the Sikhs bore down upon them, and opened a tremendous fire. But weary and unfit for contest as they were, the men had the spirit of Britons, and rushed forward to meet their powerful enemy. They repulsed and routed them for the time, but with a fearful loss both of men and officers.

They were burying their dead the next day, calling over the muster-

rolls, succouring the wounded, and consoling the dying, when Captain Lynn and little Parker ran against Lieutenant Ennis.

"I say!" cried the Irishman, "it's beginning to work itself out. We were thirteen, you know, that night at Umballah, and five are already gone."

"Four," responded Harry Lynn.

"Wrong, Captain. They have just found poor Henderson."

"Dead?"

"Stark and cold. He was under a heap of slain."

On the 21st the army marched out of camp, leaving it standing, and neared Ferozepore, after a march of sixteen miles. Here they met with General Sir John Littler, commanding about five thousand men. The Sikhs were at hand, and the whole body of our troops were at once formed into four divisions, and arranged in fighting order. But again, as in the recent battle of Moodkee, were the unfortunate men hurried into action unfit for the contest, hungry, thirsty, and weary.

The battle of Ferozeshah, as it was called, began under a mutual assault of cannon; but the light artillery of the British was of little avail against the heavy guns of the Sikhs, so the firing was ordered to cease and the infantry to advance. The Sikh army was strongly entrenched among the jungle and brushwood, rendering the approach of our infantry not only difficult but dangerous. They advanced in line, and charged with the bayonet, but the firing of the enemy was redoubled: *and the Sikhs had laid mines, which were now fired underneath our soldiers' feet.* Hundreds were thus shattered to pieces; officers, men, and horses were indiscriminately blown up. The action soon raged fearfully, the slaughter being terrible; the heavy cannonade of the Sikhs kept up a continuous roar, overwhelming with destruction the ill-fated Europeans: but the latter were gallant fellows, cheering on each other with their indomitable breasts of valour, carrying much and overcoming much. The atmosphere seemed alive with bullets; the roll of the musketry grew deeper and deeper; the shouts and noise of the combatants increased the confusion; above the roar of the tempest would be heard the voices of the commanding officers: "Men of the —— Europeans, prepare to charge. Charge!" and, mingling painfully with the tumult, rose the shrieks of the wounded and the groans of the dying.

Night put a stop to the slaughter. Some of the troops retired to bivouac at a little distance, but considerable numbers of each contending party intermingled on the plain together.

But oh! what a night it was! The air cutting cold; no tents, no covering, no food for the exhausted soldiery, who had been sixteen hours under arms, and, worse than all, *no water!* Many a wounded man died that night for want of it. There was very little medical assistance, for the numbers wounded were too great to allow of much, and the shades of darkness were upon the earth. And so there they

lay, poor fellows, groaning in their agony; no linen to bandage up their wounds; no pillow to lay their beating heads upon, save the dead bodies that crowded there, and the horses that were slain. It was a ghastly sight, that field of battle, as seen by the glimmering of some solitary torch; it would be more ghastly still in the coming moonlight. The forms of the dead lay stiffened and rigid as they had fallen, the sharp expression of anguish yet conspicuous on the livid, upturned faces. Officers and men, Sikhs and British, had fallen there together, peaceful towards each other in death, though they were not so in life. Ah! they were equal now: the officers, some perchance of noble family, who had been reared luxuriously, and the men, who, it may be, had never known a home, or an asylum worth the name of one. The one class had received no more care than the other in dying: there was no wife or mother to soothe their agonies of body, no priest to administer calmness to the soul: equal as they would be in the next world, so had been the last scene of their lives in this. But striking more painfully still upon the heart of the beholder, himself hitherto spared, came the incessant cries of the departing — of those who *might* have been saved; the vain cry that went up around for WATER; and the anguished, unanswered calls for assistance, the sharp, eager question of were they to be left there, among the dead, to die!

In a part of the field, near to the camp of the Governor-General, reclining on the ground in their arms, was a group of officers. When you last saw some of these, it was at that convivial night-meeting at Umballah. *All* were not there of that thirteen: five had been slain at Moodkee, and three more in that day's carnage. Leaving five: but two of those five were wounded, it was thought mortally.

"I say!" cried Lieutenant Bell, who had been nursed in blue and silver at his mother's apron-string, and had never known a care in the world, save that of his handsome face, "we were all calling out for a taste of the battlefield, but I don't admire such rough work as this."

"Rough enough," commented Major Challoner. "But there's the glory, you know, Bell."

"Egad, I'd rather have another sort of glory, than what's to be got fighting with these demons of Sikhs. If they were but an honourable, open foe, meeting you hand to hand, it would be something like. Who would have laid a powder-magazine under our feet, to blow us up wholesale, save these sneaking cowards of heathens?"

"All stratagems are fair in war, they say."

"Stratagems be shot!" muttered the lieutenant, wrathfully. "I think those prolific-brained enthusiasts who rave so much of the glories of war, Major, exciting one on to become soldiers, might put in a little about its horrors. What was that cry?"

"Only a death-shriek," said Major Challoner.

"Ugh!" shivered the young man. "How ghastly the heaps of slain look in the moonlight!"

"Why, yes," cried the Major. "One who faints at the sight of blood had best go away from a field when the battle's over. I freely admit that it wants the excitement of engagement to keep one's spirit above zero."

"Do you know," resumed the lieutenant, "the scene has several times to-day put me in mind of a war-description of Byron's? It's in a short poem, or fragment, of his, called 'The Devil's Drive.' Do you know it?"

"Not I," growled Major Challoner, "poetry's not in my line: never read a verse in my life. It may be in yours."

"It is a glance at the battle of Leipsic. He watches the red blood running in such streams from the mountains of slain, that the field 'looks like the waves of Hell.' The 'he' being the Devil, you know."

"Ah," cried the Major, "very likely. It partakes more of the Devil's work than angels'."

"Hark at the moans of those poor wretches, dying for water! Ugh!" shivered the young man again, "how damp it is!"

"And bitter cold. Lynn, how are you?"

A groan was the only answer Major Challoner received. Captain Lynn had been dangerously wounded in the leg with grape-shot.

"How's the pain?"

"Oh don't talk about the pain," murmured poor Harry Lynn. "If I could but have some water!" Hundreds echoed the cry that night, in vain.

Major Challoner moved away on a work of succour. Exhausted though he might be, and necessary as repose was to him, he could not hear those wails for help around, and lie down to his own rest. There came up to the spot soon afterwards, making his way over the prostrate bodies, the young Irishman, Ennis.

"Lynn! Bell!" he cried, eagerly, "by all that's true, I have seen it again!"

"Seen what?" asked Captain Lynn, rousing himself momentarily from his agony.

"That bird of ill-omen: the black form—ghost, banshee, or whatever it might be—which appeared to us that night at Umballah."

"Don't be a fool," retorted Bell, savagely, disturbed out of the sleep into which he was falling. "Your superstitious absurdities are not wanted to-night, Ennis; we've horrors enough without them."

"I swear I saw it! I swear it by the blessed Virgin! The same black, shapeless figure. It's dodging about the field, as if it were seeking something amongst the dead."

"I wish you were dodging amongst the dead!" growled the handsome lieutenant. "Why did you not stop in Ireland along with your banshees, if you are so fond of them? Your teeth are chattering now."

"With cold," answered Ennis, hastily. "But I must go back: I

am on the staff, in the place of poor Bellassis. Lynn, can I change your position before I go?"

Towards the hour of midnight, Captain Lynn, between his paroxysms of pain, had dropped into an uneasy doze, when some movement aroused him. The dark shape, spoken of by Lieutenant Ennis, was bending over him.

Doubting if he were awake, or whether it were not a delusion of the imagination, caused by the conversation of his brother officers, he rubbed his eyes and gazed up at it: when the figure threw back the dark cowl and disclosed to his astonished sight the features of the young Asiatic.

"Good Heavens, Agee! What brought—how came you here?"

"I told you I would share your fate, whatever it might be," she whispered. "*You* talked of separation, and I let you talk, keeping to my own resolve. I assumed this disguise that night at Umballah, hoping to frighten you from marching against the Sikhs. And when I found it was useless, and you left, I followed in the track of the regiment; but I could not come up with it till this night."

"It was not your voice that spoke to us that night at Umballah!" exclaimed Captain Lynn, bewildered with her words.

"It was my voice, but I spoke through a small bone instrument, in use among the Sikhs, something like a ring; so that none could recognise it to be the voice of a woman. I have come now to save you. I will find you a sure asylum amongst my countrymen. Rise, and follow me."

"I shall never rise again," was his reply. "I am severely wounded."

"Wounded!" she uttered, in an accent of deep horror. "But you must not stay in this spot: it is certain destruction."

"Destruction anywhere for me. Why in this spot more than in another."

"I have wandered amongst the Sikhs unmolested this night," she whispered, "speaking my own tongue. They have just found out the place where your chiefs are encamped, and are hastening back to fire on it. This is in the direct line. You must not remain here."

"To fire on the camp!" he screamed. "Bell!"

But the young lieutenant slept heavily. "Bell! Bell!" continued Captain Lynn.

"What are you about to do?" cried Agee, wildly. "Would you betray me—what I have told you?"

"Betray *you*! no, no, I don't mean that. Sink down here by my side, Agee; the light does not give here, in the shade of the hillock."

He pulled her down with one hand, and managed, though he could not stir his maimed legs, to stretch out the other till it touched the lieutenant, who partially aroused himself.

"Bell! Bell! fly to the camp. The enemy are upon them, opening their guns. Bell, I say!"

"What guns?" cried the sleepy lieutenant, raising himself into a

sitting posture. "Guns! Where are our scouts and sentinels then? Have we none out?"

"Are you a coward?" reiterated Captain Lynn; "every moment that you waste is worth a Jew's ransom. Fly for your life, and arouse the staff. Would you have the camp destroyed?"

The lieutenant, fully aroused now to the sense of the words, started up in haste to do his mission. Captain Lynn turned to that dark figure by his side.

"Now, Agee! quick! you can make your escape."

"As I have clung to thee in life, so will I in death," she murmured. "What, think you, will existence be for me henceforth, that you should wish me to remain in it?"

"This is madness," he exclaimed, in much excitement. "Agee!——"

Boom!—boom!—boom! rolled the thunder of the Sikhs' heavy gun. It had commenced its work of destruction. Captain Lynn supporting himself on his elbow as he best could, turned his head to look after his messenger. Even in that very moment, as he gazed, a shot overtook the young lieutenant. With a wild, piercing cry, that reached and rung in the ear of Captain Lynn, he leaped some feet into the air. It was the last cry that ever came from poor William Bell. He was shot right through the heart.

Captain Lynn, amidst all the smoke and the dismay and the confusion that now reigned around, was conscious of a start and a moan beside him: but not for a few minutes was he aware that the unhappy young lady who lay there had received her death wound.

"Oh, Agee! this is fearful!" he cried, almost beside himself with horror. "And I am helpless—helpless!" he despairingly wailed, wildly throwing his arms up, in vain efforts to move, "I cannot bear you hence to safety and to succour!"

"There is no succour for me," she returned, in hollow tones, "my soul is fleeing. But oh, Henry! which dost thou think is more welcome to me—to live on in perpetual dread that thou wilt desert me for another, or to sink quietly to death thus by thy side?"

The camp, so startlingly aroused from its temporary security, sallied out against the Sikhs, but not until fearful havoc had been committed. The whole of the staff, with the exception of Captain Hardinge, were killed or disabled. Sir Henry ordered her Majesty's 80th Foot and the 1st European Light Infantry to the attack, who drove back the enemy and spiked their gun.

What were the reflections of Captain Lynn as he lay there through the night, with the dead body of the young girl resting against him? Not such that can tend to soothe the conscience of a dying man. He felt that the career bestowed on him from above was over, and how had he worked it out? He saw things clearly now: the near approach of death dashed away the scales from his eyes, and denuded his conscience of its worldly sophistries. The recollection of the life he had led came pressing on his brain. He knew it was not one that fitted

him to stand at that judgment-bar whither he was hastening, to which *her* spirit had already flown: and, it may be, in those closing hours, in his soul's sharp tribulation, that he wailed forth an agonised petition for renewed days, like unto one we read of—not that he might return to his years of vanity, but that he might strive to redeem the past. But no: the sun went not back for him.

With daylight, the battle was renewed. The conflict raged with redoubled fury, and the slaughter on both sides was great. Victory appeared at length to favour the British, and the engagement, it was thought, was over. Our troops began to collect their wounded and bury their dead, when, suddenly, a force of the enemy, thirty thousand strong, consisting of cavalry and their camel-corps with swivels, bore down upon them. The infantry drove them back at the point of the bayonet, amidst showers of round and grape. The British forces were certainly at this moment in a critical position: *all their ammunition was expended, and they had not a single gun wherewith to answer the enemy.* Thirty thousand fresh troops and a heavy cannonade brought to bear upon our exhausted, and, as far as artillery went, defenceless soldiers! Yet strange to say, at sight of some threatening manœuvres, the Sikhs fled, leaving the British in possession of the field and of much of their artillery. And thus, in this strange manner, ended the sanguinary battle of Ferozeshah. You don't want to hear of many such, do you?

"A well! a well!" broke forth, in shouts of exultation, from some hundreds of British voices soon after the fighting was over. It was really true: they had discovered one in front of the village they had taken. Bitter disappointment! the water was putrid, it having been half filled with their dead by the Sikhs. Nevertheless, it was greedily partaken of: general officers, poor soldiers, all pressed round to drink. "Horrible!" shudders the dandy, sipping his claret at home. It *was* horrible: but when you, my dear sir, shall have experienced the blessings of a forced march under an Indian sun, winding up with a hot engagement of some six-and-twenty hours at its end, without a drop of moisture having gone into your parched lips, you will not turn away from even putrid water.

Two only remained out of the thirteen officers of Umballah memory, Captain Lynn and the young Irishman, and they were wounded unto death. Major Challoner and Captain Peacock had that day fallen. The Asiatic girl, when she pretended to foretel their doom, knowing nothing of it, gave a pretty good guess at the extent of the carnage. They, the two yet living, had been drawn aside from the dead, and were lying close to each other, amidst a whole crowd of wounded; and the agony of their wounds was even as nothing compared with that arising from their distressing thirst.

"Lynn," cried the Irishman, who retained his superstition to the last, "we can sympathise with Dives now, when he asks for Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and come and cool his tongue.

It has been an unlucky fight for us: there was no escaping our fate."

"We have earned laurels, you know," returned Captain Lynn, with half-mocking bitterness on his lip. Poor Harry Lynn! take it for all in all, his was a cruel fate, and his heart was full.

"And lost life," retorted Ennis. "For my part, I *expected* the bullet that struck me, after what I saw yesterday. You matter-of-fact Anglicans don't stoop to believe in death-warnings. Perhaps I may see it again before I die: but it must make haste."

A paler shade, if that could be, came over the face of Captain Lynn, and he pressed his hands upon his temples. He was about to speak, about to tell Ennis that he need have no fear of seeing "it" again, when a wild, shouting-noise in the distance stopped his words.

"What's all that?" inquired Lieutenant Ennis of a soldier who approached, carrying something in his hand. It was a man belonging to Captain Lynn's corps.

"We have been rummaging over the Sikh entrenchment, sir," was the reply, "and in it we have found the mess stores which they had captured, intended for the Bengal Native Infantry. There was a lot of beer in it—so glorious! It is being dealt out, and I have brought you some."

The officers raised their earnest eyes, their parched, eager lips, and a rush of joy, almost frantic in its excess, illumined their dying features.

"God be thanked?—He is with us still, Lynn," reverently spoke Ennis, as he fell back, after drinking of the sweetest draught he had ever yet tasted, "we can now die in peace. God be thanked!"

"Amen," responded Harry Lynn.

PLUM-PUDDING AND PANCAKES.

WE suppose that no calamity short of the heavens falling would prevent our annual enjoyment of the national Christmas dish. "Give me roast beef of Old England and plum-pudding," says the Englishman, and he will defy the world.

As long ago as 1658 we find a certain Chevalier D'Arvieux describing the national plum-pudding in no very complimentary terms, and it is certainly a very unsavoury picture that he draws, a dish that even Sancho Panza himself might turn from:—"Their pudding was detestable. It is a compound of scraped biscuit, of flour, suet, currants, salt and pepper, which are made into a paste, wrapped in a cloth and boiled in a pot of broth; it is then taken out of the cloth and put in a plate, and some old cheese is grated over it, which gives it an unbearable smell. Leaving out the cheese, the thing itself is not so very bad." We are tempted to declare that the "good old times" were not, at least, productive of good plum-puddings.

Antiquaries have been at some pains to establish the identity of an Old English Christmas dish, the "hackin," with the more modern plum-pudding, which latter term is of later origin. Now, the "hackin" is always vaguely mentioned as the "great sausage," and an old tract says "The 'hackin' must be boiled by daybreak, or else two young men must take the maiden (the cook) by the arms, and run her round the market-place till she is ashamed of her laziness." An athletic exercise which all, no doubt, thoroughly enjoyed. Others are of opinion that plum-pudding did not come into existence until about the time of Charles II., and in support of this they point to its mention by name in the chronicles of the Court festivities, and they assert that before this time plum-porridge was the national "pièce de résistance." Plum-porridge does not, to our modern ideas, seem very inviting, being a kind of soup, thick and rich with plums.

It may have been the remembrance of this mess that caused the unfortunate mistake of the French king when entertaining the English ambassador at Christmas. The story runs that desiring to propitiate the Englishman and gratify his national tastes, the king procured from England a recipe for a plum-pudding, which in every detail was attended to, except in one essential—the cloth. The tableau may be easily imagined.

From passages of ancient poetry we gather that it was formerly the custom to "bake" the puddings, at least in some households, but this perhaps was in keeping with the "Christmas-pye," which in ancient days occupied the paramount position on the board, in much the

same relation as the turkey of the present. The "Christmas-pye was composed of such things as chickens, livers, eggs, raisins and other sweetmeats, and a goose was also considered a particularly fine basis for the 'pye.'"

Hone gives an extract from the *Newcastle Chronicle* of the 6th January, 1770, which states:—"Monday last was brought from Howick to Berwick, to be shipped for London for Sir Henry Grey, Bart., a pie, the contents whereof are as follows, viz.: 2 bushels of flour, 20 lbs. of butter, 4 geese, 2 turkeys, 2 rabbits, 4 wild ducks, 2 woodcocks, 6 snipes and 4 partridges, 2 neats'-tongues, 2 curlews, 7 blackbirds and 6 pigeons. It is supposed a very great curiosity and was made by Mrs. Dorothy Patterson, housekeeper at Howick. It was nearly nine feet in circumference at bottom, weighs about twelve stones, will take two men to present it to table. It is neatly fitted with a case and four small wheels to facilitate its use to every guest that inclines to partake of its contents at table."

The Christmas-pye, in common with the mince-pie, was condemned by the Puritans as idolatrous and savouring of superstition.

It is not difficult to seek an explanation of the wonderful popularity of the plum-pudding, as it principally results from reverence for tradition and from a taste which has well-nigh become hereditary, from generation to generation. We all, from childhood, know that awful moment, when at a certain period of the Christmas dinner, a delicious pause takes place, when the anxious mother, expectant and spell-bound children glance towards the door, and at length the monster in flames is placed on the table. Everyone feels the inspiration of that moment, and discovers that Christmas Day is not as other days are. The pudding in the eyes of each family is invariably considered "perfect," and fears are dispelled: as expressed in the words of Mrs. Bob Cratchit, "That now the weight was off her mind, she would confess that she had her doubts about the quantity of flour."

We have lately noticed a growing heresy which has crept in among us, viz., the enclosing of the pudding in a shape or mould, and thus boiled; it is borne to table bearing the marks of its imprisonment, shorn of its rotund and jolly proportions, which constitute its great charm. The miserable practice "out Herod's-Herod," for it altogether removes the character of our childhood's friend, whose round, good-natured face warms us to him, and we can scarce repress a sigh as we view him, in his modish and pinched disguise.

Antiquarians assert that the ancient origin of pancakes is to be found in the pagan festival of Fornacalia held in Rome on the 18th February to commemorate the making of bread, before the Goddess Fornax considerately gave ovens to men; while others ascribe the whole of the ancient usages on Shrove Tuesday to the feast of Bacchus; and indeed Eton boys once were accustomed to write

verses to Bacchus at Shrovetide and affix them to the college doors, The Venerable Bede speaks of the "mensis placentasum," rendered "pancake month," since cakes were offered in worship to the Sun by the pre-Christian Saxons during Solmonath (February); Sol oddly enough meaning food or cakes (Saxon).

The Romish priests, however, fostered the custom of pancake and fritter eating, regarded as an emblem of martyrdom, by causing the feast to be preceded by a general "shriving" or confession on Tuesday before Lent; and up to a very late date the bell rung in every parish which summoned all to be shriven, got to be named the "pancake-bell," quaintly referred to by Taylor, the water-poet, in 1617.

At York the apprentices, &c., of the city were allowed by custom to repair to the Minster and ring the "pancake-bell" on Shrove Tuesday in the company of their visitors, who had permission to inspect the lantern and bells. An attempt made in 1690 to suppress the licence was most vigorously resented by the populace, with success; for the day was looked to by the country people within distance of York, who flocked to visit their friends, apprentices or otherwise, and see the city and Minster, general feasting and making merry signalling the holiday.

The pancake or fritter, for their identity is near, solemnly consecrated on all hands, was often the means of showing the dexterity of the cook in tossing the same in the pan without soot; for at "Tedbury Mop," a hiring-fair for servants, no maid-servant was accounted fit for the farmer's kitchen unless she could make apple fritters and toss them without soot or spoiling the batter. In Pasquil's "Palinodia" (1634) the following verse occurs :—

> And every man and maide doe take their turne
> And tosse their pancakes up for fear they burne,
> And all the kitchen doth with laughter sound
> To see the pancakes fall upon the ground.

We have it on the authority of the ancient Tusser that it was the rustic custom to present the first pancake made on Shrove Tuesday to her that possessed the unenviable reputation for "lying-a-bed long," or other delinquency; and he amusingly remarks, "it mostly falls to the dog's share at last, for no one will own it their due."

Westminster School can boast of still preserving intact its ancient and interesting ceremony of "tossing the pancake," annually performed to this day on Shrove Tuesday. The college cook, bearing the pancake in a tin dish, preceded by the beadle from the Abbey in full paraphernalia of office, comes with due solemnity from the kitchen and tosses the pancake across the bar which divides the upper from the lower school, in view of boys and masters assembled. The school charter which establishes the custom provides that if the cook successfully accomplishes the feat, he shall claim a sovereign from the Dean, and if any boy shall be deft enough to catch the pancake whole before it falls to the ground, he shall also exact a sovereign from the same

reverend authority; and in consequence a very edifying scrimmage among the boys is witnessed.

The pancake in question, composed only of flour and water and made a week previously, is about six or seven inches in diameter and half an inch thick, and being therefore very hard in substance does not present any great difficulty for catching, but the scramble of the boys more often than not defeats their object. On one occasion the cook was so maladroit as to fail in tossing the pancake across the bar, and received a severe "booking" of lexicons from the scholars, and we grieve to say he so far lost his self-control as to deal an unpleasant blow with the frying-pan on the eye of a perhaps future reciter of the "Adelphi." At the present time, a slight hitch in the proceedings is afforded from the fact that the cook of the college is a female and the duties and emoluments of this ceremony thus devolve upon the head porter. Eton College also bears witness to a similar custom.

Pancake eating had, however, its drawbacks: for up to a very late date, in the market town of Hoddesdon, in Hertfordshire, they appear to have eaten pancakes under a kind of feudal law. Here the veritable curfew-bell was rung at four o'clock on the morning of Shrove Tuesday, this being the signal for pancake making and eating, until the bell rung again at eight o'clock that night extinguished the feast; in fact, so religious were the inhabitants as to the matter that after that hour not a single pancake remained in the town to be had for love or money.

The Scotch, more especially the Highlanders, have their edition of pancakes in the "sauty bannocks," made by a baker who should not open his mouth during the process; and charms are inserted in these mystic cakes which, slept on beneath the pillow, speaks volumes to the superstitious to whose lot the "lucky" one may fall, presaging marriage before next Shrove Tuesday, "spaeing" sweetheart, or even uncanny events.

Perhaps the omen most to be cherished by any of us on Pancake Tuesday is that contained in the Shepherd's Almanack for 1676, which says "So much as the sun shineth on that day, the like will shine every day in Lent." If that be true, we shall eat our pancakes religiously with a thankful relish, if Dr. Richardson allows us, on a fine Shrove Tuesday; for who can ever resist the delicately browned fragment of paste acted upon by the pungent lemon and the yielding sugar, sweet and sour that amicably meet in union?

Vivat placenta, then! The pancake is not perhaps an æsthetic or poetic thing of beauty; it is not a dish of which Keats might have sung, meet for the feast of St. Agnes' Eve, but it is a right-down English treat, and has earned its footing to still flaunt itself merrily with us.

LIONEL J. CLARIS.

MY SATURDAYS.

POOR MRS. PERTH.

I.

A GOOD many years ago, when I began to emerge from the deepest shadows of my widowhood, and to make acquaintance with the neighbours who had left cards when I first settled at Tamston, I received a visit from Captain and Mrs. Perth. Poor Mrs. Perth—everybody called her poor—was the sort of woman who by herself would make only a faint blur on the sensitive plate of one's memory; but seen with her husband, she could not be forgotten. She was photographed, as it were, by his strong light, and seemed as much an appendage of him as his shadow. He was very tall, and very solid, carried his nose in the air, and put forward his chest for the public admiration, something like a pouter pigeon, only that there was a great deal of the pouter and very little of the pigeon about him.

He always wore the shortest of coats, which exaggerated his already large dimensions, and gave him the air of a giant schoolboy; and he kept up the character by assuming a ponderous playfulness which was enough to crush the gayest spirits. It—or he—had crushed poor Mrs. Perth. She followed him about (except when he ostentatiously gave her precedence), a limp female duplicate of himself. She, too, had a large nose, and carried it high; in deference to his frequent admonitions, she had learnt to keep the flattest of backs; in harmony with his tastes, her bony form was enclosed in a short cloth jacket. Yet nothing could give her substance. She did not seem real, somehow; it was difficult to help forgetting her existence, and very hard to realise that she had an independent life of her own, and did not literally breathe with her husband's breath. She did in every sense, except that she had a separate pair of lungs to do it with.

The Captain opened the conversation without delay.

"How do you do, ma'am? Very glad you're coming out. Heard you were ready to see visitors, so I thought we'd come and be friendly. Bad for anyone to mope, ain't it? Much better enjoy life, and make the best of things."

"*So* much better," echoed his wife. I faintly assented.

"Now, here in Tamston you're just suited to a T." "Fine air, pretty country, pleasant society. Some people call it dull, but you like to be quiet, so you won't mind that. I never mind it: I'm always jolly, and I never think of being dull. 'My mind to me a kingdom is,' as Lord Byron says: doesn't he?"

"I don't *think* it's Lord Byron, dear," murmured his better instructed half.

"Oh, if you're going to correct me, Mrs. P., I give in. Never any

use to dispute with ladies: is it, Mrs. Singleton? They always know best, and they always have the last word."

"Ladies have more time for reading than gentlemen," I suggested.

"To be sure, to be sure. They can go fadding round after poetry-books, and amusing themselves, while we poor rascals are working and fighting for their living, and then get laughed at for being ignorant boors."

An absolute scowl spoiled his forced pleasantry, and his poor wife trembled into an apology.

"Oh no, indeed, dear; now I think of it, I'm not at all sure where it is: perhaps it is Byron, as you say."

I asked Captain Perth if he was a lover of Byron, and so got gradually off the dangerous ground on to general literature; but the Captain was no reader, and that subject did not last long. By way of starting a new one, I remarked that the Vicar—who was away on his summer holiday—would be back the following week.

"I'm sure I shall be glad of it," snarled Captain Perth. "Wish he'd stayed at home and minded his business, instead of gallivanting off to France."

"It would have been so much better," sighed Mrs. Perth.

"I don't see why," I answered. "Clergy want their holidays as well as other people, and our Vicar works hard all the rest of the year."

"Rubbish about holidays! Beg pardon, Mrs. Singleton; but it does annoy me to hear all this talk about holidays. Look at me: do I ever get any holidays? (I never heard that he had any working-days.) And what does the parson do but potter about among a lot of old women, and write sermons, that he must go off for two months, and leave the parish at the mercy of an underbred jackanapes who thinks of nothing but feathering his own nest?"

The usual echo did not follow, and I said:

"Do you mean the locum tenens? I thought him a nice young man; and, considering how young he is, his sermons are not bad."

"A nice young man—that's just what he is, ha, ha! Oh, a very nice young man, indeed! You've hit him off to the life, Mrs. Singleton."

"I don't understand," I said, rather stiffly.

"Well, I'll tell you then: I'll tell you just what sort of a nice young man he is."

"Captain!" implored his wife.

"Well, Mrs. P., what is it?"

She fumbled with her bag—of course she had a bag in her hand—looked at him entreatingly, and said nothing.

"I'm waiting for you, Mrs. P. You interrupted me when I was speaking to Mrs. Singleton, so no doubt you had something important to say. I won't interrupt you; I'm waiting to hear it."

Poor Mrs. Perth fidgeted more, and her watery blue eyes grew more watery, so I came to the rescue.

"Perhaps Mrs. Perth thinks as I do, that it is a pity to disturb my favourable impression of Mr. Mowbray, especially as he has only one Sunday more to stay with us."

"No, ma'am; people should be known for what they are. When a twopenny-ha'penny young curate, without even a proper curacy to starve on decently, but knocking about doing odd jobs, uses his opportunity of being brought in among decent people to make love to a young lady that he has no business to look at, I say he's a scoundrel, and I say he should be known as a scoundrel!"

His face had grown so red, and his voice so loud, that I was really frightened, and could only observe:

"Dear me, this is very sad."

"Very sad," echoed Mrs. Perth, tearfully.

"Sad! It's disgraceful, villainous! He has been making up to my daughter Annabella. *My* daughter! Thought he'd line his pockets with her little bit of money. But he found himself out in his reckoning there. I sent him off with a flea in his ear, and let him know she wasn't for fortune-hunters. And neither I nor any of my family set foot inside the church until he's out of the town. So now you know the sort of nice young man he is."

I was utterly at a loss what to say next, and the Captain seemed to have run himself out of breath in his abuse of poor Mr. Mowbray; so he took leave. His wife would no more have dared to give the signal for departure than she would have presumed to ring the bell for dinner. He rattled the bones of my hand with a fearful lateral pressure which drove all my rings into my flesh; she gave me a flabby brown kid glove with something inside it; and they relieved me of their presence. I never was so glad to hear the door shut behind any visitor.

II.

Captain and Mrs. Perth walked home in silence, glum on his part, trembling on hers. Crushed though she was, and seldom daring, even mentally, to comment on her lord and master, she had too much of the feeling of a lady not to be bitterly ashamed of his rude outburst. She knew that whatever he said when he spoke again would rasp her soul, and would probably demand a more hearty assent than she could furnish; and yet she longed for him to speak, the waiting for it was so terrible. At last he did.

"Well, I think I've cooked my young gentleman's goose there, at any rate: Mrs. Singleton won't be come over by him any more. And I'll do the same for him in every house in the parish, until it's too hot to hold him. I only wish I could get hold of any fool who was thinking of giving him a living, and put a spoke in his wheel."

"But if he had a living, dear, should you object to him so very much? I thought it was because he was poor that you were vexed."

"Object to him! of course I should object to him, He's come

sneaking round my house when I was away, and making love to my daughter without my leave; and if he were to be made Archbishop of Canterbury to-morrow, I wouldn't let her look at him."

"Of course, dear, it would not make any real difference, and I might have known that it was not money that you thought about. But if he were to apologise now, and treat you with proper respect? Because of poor Annabella, you know."

"If he were to go down on his knees to me I'd be glad of the chance of kicking him. 'Pon my word, Mrs. P., you talk as if you were on his side. Now, please speak out, and say which it is to be, for you'll have to choose between him and me."

And the Captain stood stock still, and drove his stick into the ground, glaring at her. Down went the bag out of his wife's shaking hands into the mud.

"Don't say anything so dreadful, dear," she begged. "Oh, don't: as if I could ever be on anyone's side against you."

"Well, then, never you say another word to me about the young scoundrel, unless it's to tell me that he's left off humbugging you, and that you know that he *is* a scoundrel. You may tell me that as often as you like; but if you come round begging for Mr. Mowbray, why, you'd better go to Mr. Mowbray and beg for me. And on my sacred word of honour, if I can't get any peace in my own house, with my children rebelling against me, and my wife taking their side and turning against me, I'll turn every one of them out of it."

Long before he had finished this tirade he was striding on ahead, with furious haste; and poor Mrs. Perth picked up her bag, and tried to follow. As she stooped, she felt queer and giddy, and for a moment thought she was going to faint; then her heart beat fast, as if it would stifle her, and she felt its quick loud throbs in her ears and head. She leaned against a wall, dazed and terrified; and when the world seemed to grow solid again, she moved slowly homewards. Fortunately, Fir Grove was not far off, and at the garden gate she met her second daughter, Caroline.

"Mamma, how flushed you are," said the girl. "Was Mrs. Singleton's room hot? Or is there anything wrong? Wronger than usual, I mean."

"I don't feel well, dear; not at all well. Just now I thought I should have fainted in the road. I don't know how I got home."

"Where was papa, then?" demanded Caroline.

"Oh, he had left me before; he did not know I was not well."

"He might have seen, I should think," growled his daughter. "Come upstairs and lie down, mamma. It will be tea-time in half-an-hour, and I'll bring you up yours: you must just keep quiet."

"I'll lie down till tea-time, then, but I can't stay upstairs. It would be sure to worry your papa, and he has worries enough already; and then if you come up waiting on me, dear, he and Annabella will be left alone together, and he might say something to her."

"I should like to say something to him," cried Caroline, "if I weren't so hideously afraid of him. Why—why—are we all to be made miserable like this? I don't know why Annabella doesn't run away. I should, if I had the luck to have a lover."

"Oh, hush, dear," sighed her mother, sinking down on her bed. "Don't talk so wickedly; remember that you must honour your father; and no good ever comes of stolen marriages. They haven't God's blessing on them, and how can they turn out well? Annabella must be patient; we must all be patient."

"Yes, but it can't go on so for ever, and it needn't either. Arthur Mowbray was here while you were out ——"

"Here!" cried Mrs. Perth. "Caroline! How could you let him in? What would your father say?"

"I didn't let him in, for he opened the garden gate for himself, and we were inside; and I don't care twopence what papa would say, so long as he doesn't say. And as he doesn't know, he can't, you see. But what Arthur Mowbray came to tell us makes a great difference. He says that when papa turned round on him so furiously, he had no opportunity of saying anything about his circumstances; and, indeed, I think he was as much frightened as if he had been one of ourselves. But it is quite a mistake to think that because he is taking a locumtenency he is poor; he has £300 a year of his own, and he is to have a family living, worth £600 a year more. The old rector of it is dying now; and that is why it is not worth while for him to take regular work."

"Why, that is £900 a year!"

"Yes; and who do you think his people are? Why, the Elchester Mowbrays! Lord Elchester is his father's cousin, and it is he who is giving him the living. So you see, it is the most outrageous and ridiculous nonsense for papa to turn up his nose at him, and talk about his scheming for the £100 a year which I believe will constitute Bella's magnificent fortune. It's a splendid chance for her, that's the fact; and papa must be brought to hear reason."

"I'm afraid nothing will make him alter his mind," said her mother sadly. "He told me just now that if Mr. Mowbray were made Archbishop of Canterbury to-morrow, he would not let Annabella look at him. But now, dear, I think if I were to be quite quiet just for a few minutes that I could manage to go down to tea, and don't you say anything about my being poorly."

"Well, I'll be off then, mamma; and I hope you'll go to sleep and never hear that odious bell. I'll tell Maria not to clang it quite so loud as usual."

But poor Mrs. Perth was so afraid of that catastrophe that she did not let herself drop asleep at all, though she longed for a few minutes' rest and oblivion as much as it was in her docile nature to long for anything forbidden. And when the brazen clang of the aforesaid instrument of torture went through her head, she meekly obeyed its

summons, and encountered Caroline's reproachful looks, as she made her way to her place behind the urn. Captain Perth began cutting the bread as if each slice were Mr. Mowbray's head; and Dora, a junior girl aged about thirteen, helped herself to the crispest of the hot cakes, and prepared to extract all the fun she could out of the situation. Last of all, came in the culprit, Annabella, and slipped into a chair by Dora. She was a pretty girl, and wore an air of furtive triumph, betraying itself in a high colour, uncalled-for smiles and general inattention to what was going on. Caroline was heartily on her sister's side, yet she was provoked by her. The meal was a very silent one. At last it came to an end; the master of the house went off to his own den, where he kept his pipes and fishing-rods; Caroline settled her mother on the drawing-room sofa, with injunctions to keep quiet, and have a nap, and then went to superintend Dora's evening lessons; while Annabella was supposed to be dreaming in solitude over her lover.

Poor Mrs. Perth's feverish pulses slackened in the quiet room; the sofa and the silence rested her, and she was just sinking into dreamy comfort when Annabella re-appeared, rushed up, and flung herself on her knees beside her.

"Oh mamma! I am so glad to find you alone—I wanted to talk to you."

"Did you, dear?" said her mother, smoothing her hair with a heart full of trepidation.

"Of course I did. To whom should I come but to my mother? I know you feel for me, I know you will help us."

"Dear Bella, I've done all I could for you. I did speak to your papa, but he won't hear of it."

"Yes, but that was just at first, and he didn't understand. It is all quite different from what he thinks. Do you know what Arthur told us this afternoon?"

"Caroline told me, and it all sounded very nice. I'm sure it is just what I could have wished for you, if your papa had been willing."

"Oh, he must be willing; he must come round. He would like to see me a rector's wife, with £900 a year, and cousin to Lord Elchester. *I* don't care about these things you know—a bit; if Arthur had only a curate's salary, I should love him all the more; but it will make all the difference to papa."

"If he only had known!" sighed her mother.

"He must know now, then. You will tell him, won't you? And then he will feel rather foolish at first, but he won't let such a match slip; and he will come round, and we shall all be happy. And you shall come and stay with me, dearest mamma, for long visits, and forget all your worries. Only do go and tell him."

"My dear, I *can't!*" exclaimed the poor lady, sitting straight up in her dismay. "He expressly forbade me this afternoon ever to mention Mr. Mowbray to him again; he as good as said that he would

turn me out of the house if I did. And, indeed, I might as well be turned out of the house as live in it if he wouldn't speak to me," answered Mrs. Perth, beginning to cry.

"Of course he would speak to you, because when once it was all settled, he would be quite jolly, and so proud of the arrangement, he would soon come to think he had made it all himself. Oh, mamma, do! It is all my life that is in your hands. You can make us both happy."

"It would *kill* me to face him," said her mother slowly.

"No, indeed, mamma, don't be so fanciful. It's your being so afraid of him that does half the harm. You just show him that you have a will of your own, and you'll see what good it will do him. Oh, do go to him! It is such a good time now; he has been having his pipe, and he'll be quite placable."

Mrs. Perth sat still on the side of the sofa, her hands clasped in her lap, looking straight before her. She was driven into an awful strait. Her husband's anger was terrible to her—more terrible than death; for Death would be a kindly angel of release, but his wrath was heavy to her, with all the power of the inextinguishable love she bore him. Yet now there opened before her child a future of love and happiness barred only by his hand; and she was told that it rested with her to win him to unbar it, and let the young life in. Could she? Dare she?

Annabella had tact enough to wait. At last her mother stood up, and said:

"I will go and try. God bless you, my child, and give me strength."

The girl was awed by the solemn words, and the dear familiar commonplace face set in a strange resolve. She cried:

"Oh, mamma, don't. Perhaps it will be too much for you. I oughtn't to have asked."

Annabella threw her arms round her mother, but she put her quietly back, and moved to the door. She passed through the hall, and along the passage, without pausing for a moment until she reached the door of her husband's room. Then she leaned against the wall to gather strength, and think of Annabella's happiness for which she was to fight; and in all the might of a mother's love she took her life in her hand, and knocked at the door.

"Come in," grunted the Captain.

She came in; she shut the door behind her; she went over to the table beside which he was sitting smoking, with his legs on a chair. She rested her hands on the table; her mouth was dry, and she could not speak.

"Well, Mrs. P., what is it?"

A few words came faltering then.

"I know, dear," she began, "that you forbade me to speak to you. But if you would just—this once—let me tell you ——"

Captain Perth jumped to his feet, knocking down the chair, with a furious word, and simply glared at his wife. She gave him one look,

then swayed forward, and fell on the table. The feeble life of love, and unwearying patience, and unending self-sacrifice, had slain itself in one supreme effort: Death had come with her husband's scowl on his brow; but he had come, and she was at rest.

III.

Mrs. Perth's death was felt by the neighbourhood to be a "shock." It was all that there was to be said about it. Nobody had known her well, and nobody missed her much.

Inside Fir Grove, however, was dire consternation, and an ever-increasing loss and want, heaviest when they were least felt. When once the first inevitable crash of dismay and natural horror was over, and ordinary grief could take its place, the household suddenly felt that it had fallen to pieces. They were all disorganised, at odds with each other, miserable apart, and disunited even in their sorrow; there was no one to hold them together merely by dint of loving them all. Captain Perth never realised his share in his wife's death. It was utterly impossible for him even to imagine the tortures of nervous misery which had for years been wearing her life down to a thread. And yet, at the bottom of his mind there lay a heavy sediment of something not unlike remorse, a sense that she might have been happier, if he had willed it. But this vague regret was lost to consciousness in his daily and hourly want of her; he missed her services, her presence, her dutiful love. In fact, he missed his slave; but it was as a slave that she had lived, and as a slave she was mourned. He settled down into chronic moroseness. Externally, he was as much as ever the tyrant of his own house, but now there was no love which owned him as master; he could oppress lives and spoil tempers, but no heart beat for him to break.

Annabella was the only member of the family who was not ultimately the worse for their great sorrow. Her loss was double of Caroline's, for Mr. Mowbray was thoroughly frightened off by the unpleasant episode of his proposed mother-in-law's sudden death; he could not of course renew his advances for some time, and before that allowable period had arrived, his judicious friends had persuaded him to renounce the idea of so undesirable a connection. Having been decisively refused by the young lady's father, he was perfectly free; and in course of time he used his freedom to marry someone else, though he did not enjoy much domestic felicity, as the poor woman died in a year, leaving him with a little baby. But Annabella did not wait for his withdrawal to bury her dream. The happiness for the sake of which she had driven her mother to her death—now seemed to her a thing accursed and forbid. The secret which she alone knew she kept to herself, as soon as she found that her first mad self-upbraidings had not been understood, and it burnt itself into her heart. From a silly girl it made her into a brave and thoughtful woman. She had sacrificed others to herself; now, she

would sacrifice herself to others. And she did so; she lived to purpose and to usefulness. She did her father's direct bidding in all things, and saw to his personal comforts; but she heeded him little, and went her own way to the poor, to schools, to classes, avoiding collisions by not consulting him. He seemed to have some fear of her in her new phase, and in many things delayed interfering with her until he had grown used to her ways and doings.

All this was an old story when I began my Saturdays. The Misses Perth had long left off their mourning, and the Captain's hat had gradually emerged from seclusion within an enormous hatband. Dora was grown up, and Annabella was considered an old maid.

They were not a popular family. Miss Perth was a person of consideration, and always to be depended upon if anything was wanted, but she was suspected of being "superior"; Caroline was lively, but rather sharp, and not always good-tempered; and there was nothing attractive about Dora. Captain Perth nobody liked. Still there they were, a part of Tamston society; and of course they asked people to Fir Grove, and were asked out in return. At least two of the family came to me every Saturday.

One Saturday in August, they appeared in unusual force, all the four coming together; and I was rather pleased to see a large party, as, for various reasons, several of my habitués would be away, and the weather was uncertain, and likely to discourage those who came from a distance. Just as I was talking to them, the Vicar came in, accompanied by a tall, pale clergyman, leading a little child.

"I have brought a friend with me this afternoon, Mrs. Singleton, whom I daresay you will remember—Mr. Mowbray, who looked after you all for me one summer some years ago."

I should not have recognized the mild young curate of my recollections, in this settled and saddened man; but there was nothing affected about him, and he had not the air of playing the afflicted widower. I welcomed him, and glanced round to see what the Perths were doing. The Captain had tucked Caroline's hand under his arm and taken her away, telling Dora to come with him; but Annabella stayed to have the meeting over.

"You will find many friends at Tamston who have not forgotten you, Mr. Mowbray," I said. "I dare say Miss Perth is of the number."

"Certainly," said Annabella, calmly shaking hands with him. "I am very glad to meet you again, and to see your little girl. What is her name?"

"Elizabeth Sarah," her father confessed ruefully: "she was named after her two grandmothers, but we always call her Lily."

"That is a pretty name," said Annabella. "Will Lily come with me, and see the little fishes in the greenhouse?"

She had not the least intention of manœuvring, and only seized the

first opportunity for making a rapid retreat; but of course, if she had wanted to secure Mr. Mowbray's coming to look for her in a quiet place, she could have done nothing better. Fortunately, the Mintons were not there to comment; the Vicar took Mr. Mowbray out to renew his old acquaintances, and I went to look after the Perths, and try to prevent awkward situations.

I had not had long to exert myself when a fresh complication was added to the state of affairs, by a downpour of rain, which drove everyone into the house. Annabella took Lily into an apartment which I call my housekeeping-room, where I keep my jams and linen, and make my messes, to introduce her to my canaries—and she kept her there, telling her stories, and showing her pictures. The rest of the small party gathered in the drawing-room, and we had some music; but our resources in that respect were not large, and I was beginning to feel oppressed, when Archie exclaimed:

"Aunt, Miss Minton has never seen a table turned! Here's a capital opportunity; let's enlighten her mind, and bring her up to the level of the day."

Lucilla laughed nervously, and looked at me.

"Certainly," I answered, "if you can find half-a-dozen people willing to sit with their fingers on mahogany until their arms ache, waiting for manifestations that don't come."

"Or that do," said Archie solemnly. "I have seen things that would make you quiver all over; haven't I, Miss Minton?"

"Oh yes," cried Lucilla; "some of your stories are wonderful. But then, you know, I believe you make them up."

"If you are a sceptic," he replied, "I won't have you at the table: you would be a malign influence."

"Oh no, indeed, I'm not a sceptic," she pleaded. "I'll believe everything you tell me. Only let me come and see, though I know I shall be frightened to death."

"Well, you shall be one of the circle. Now, who else? Auntie, you would rather not, I know: I depend on Miss Graham, she's a host in herself at all occult work; Mrs. Lingard, I have a sense that you possess undeveloped powers,—come and develope them."

"With all my heart," laughed Rhoda; "at least I have developed honesty, and I won't cheat."

"What a rara avis you must be! But I want a couple of gentlemen; will you give us the sanction of the Church?" he asked the Vicar.

"I wouldn't if I believed it were anything but nonsense; but as I'm quite sure that real spirits have something else to do besides rapping their knuckles for your amusement, I'll come to see the fun," replied our pastor.

"Mr. Mowbray, will you join us?"

"I am sorry," responded that gentleman, rather primly; "but I think that either you are going to communicate with spirits, or to play

at doing so. The first is unlawful, the second is profane. I must ask to be excused."

"I'll come, if you'll have me, Mr. Rintoul," Captain Perth put in. "I'm too old a soldier to be afraid of the devil, or afraid of having a laugh at him either."

So the party was made up, and adjourned to the dining-room. There, the furniture was got out of the way, the sofa pushed up against the wall at one end, the chairs moved out into the hall, the large table folded up and put aside, and the field left clear for whatever a moderate-sized round mahogany table on castors might choose to do with itself. We spectators (of whom Mr. Mowbray was not one) seated ourselves on and about the sofa; the operators took their places round the table, and began staring hard into it, and growing very flushed in the face, after the manner of amateurs at this work.

"Do you believe in this sort of thing?" Caroline asked me.

"I don't believe that spirits come back in this way," I answered. "It would be absurd and irreverent. But that's all I can say. I don't know what I *do* believe. I have seen some very queer things happen, and so has Archie, though I dare say he has been humbugging Lucilla now; but how or why they happened I have not the least idea."

"My fingers are tingling," Rhoda announced.

"Don't speak," gasped Lucilla, whose eyes were starting out of her head with the energy of her self-concentration.

"It won't do any harm," Miss Gordon remarked quietly, "and it will make you more comfortable."

"Nothing could make *me* more comfortable," observed the Vicar, "except a dutiful parishioner who would brush a fly off my bald head. Madness is likely to ensue."

"There's nothing there, I assure you," said Dora Perth, going round to look.

"I feel every one of his six feet dancing a fandango on the top of my bump of conscientiousness; he naturally selects the most prominent place. Are you going to persuade me against the evidence of my own sense?"

"Aren't you sitting here to be persuaded that a table can move without hands?" demanded Dora.

"You have me there, Miss Dora: what it is to place oneself in a false position! I submit; I don't know a fly when I see it, much less feel it."

"You will know what a table can do presently," said Miss Gordon; "it will be off in a minute."

The table creaked, tilted a little, then began to turn, slowly at first, and then more quickly. They all got up from the chairs, which we pulled back, and moved round with it. Miss Gordon ordered it to stop, but it went on turning faster and faster. Archie said, "Stop, then, stupid!" with emphasis, but with no result. Everybody repeated the

order in turn, but the table paid no heed, until Captain Perth said gruffly: "Stop, confound you!" It stopped with such a sudden jerk that some of the hands were thrown off, and the Vicar received a violent blow on one toe. He was too much excited to think about rubbing it, and forgetting all his principles about spirits, cried:

"Go on, Captain, speak to it; it'll attend to you. Ask if it will talk to us."

The Captain, thus suddenly exalted to the dignity of a medium, assumed the reins of government, with an air of standing no nonsense.

"Now then, are you going to speak to us?"

The table heaved up one leg, and gave three raps on the floor.

"That's nonsense," said Captain Perth; "speak, if you can."

"They don't *talk*," interposed Miss Gordon, with suppressed amusement: "three raps mean yes, and one means no. It will communicate with us."

"But how is it to tell us anything, if it can only say yes and no?"

"You must go through the alphabet, and it will rap at the right letter, and so you can spell the words."

"That's slow work," grumbled the new medium; "but here goes. What shall I ask it?"

"Ask it if there are any spirits present," suggested Lucilla, in an awe-stricken whisper.

Captain Perth put the question, and then began his alphabet, coming to grief several times over the relative positions of l, m, and n. Down came the raps decisively, one after the other.

"Are there any spirits here?"

"L—A—S—H—I—N—G—S."

There was a general scream. "Apparently, some of them are Irish," observed Archie. "You'd better take a turn at the questioning, Mrs. Lingard."

But Captain Perth was not disposed to cede his pre-eminence. He went on again.

"Men or women?"

"P—R—I—E—S—T—S."

"One for you, Vicar," he shouted, with a great laugh.

"Are they happy or unhappy?"

The table laconically replied: "U—N."

"Why?"

"N—O—C—A—S—H."

There was another laugh, but the Vicar began to look as if the lawfulness of the proceedings were no longer clear to his mind.

"Are there no men here?"

One rap.

"Where are they?"

"G—O—N—E—F—A—R—T—H—E—R."

"And fared worse, of course. What for?"

"K—I—L—L—I—N—G—W—I—V—E—S."

Caroline was sitting next me, and had laid her hand unconsciously on my arm, in the excitement of following the questions and answers. I suddenly felt it tighten with a grip that drove a thrill of terror through me. I looked at her; her face was white and tense, as she leaned eagerly forward. Her father went on with a laugh.

"What, all of them! I'm afraid you're a woman's-rights humbug, Madam Table. Are there no women here?"

Three raps.

"Many?"

Three raps.

"Any that I know?"

Three raps.

"Who?"

"P—O—O—R—M—R—S—P—E—R—T—H."

The Captain sprang up as if shot, with a nasty exclamation. "Have done with this nonsense," he said roughly.

"Yes," said Archie, moving away, "we've had enough of it."

I never could tell why Miss Graham acted as she did. But when the rest drew back, she kept her hands on the table, and asked:

"Does Mrs. Perth's spirit wish to communicate?"

The table heaved and creaked; it seemed almost to be curving and writhing. It tilted under her light touch until its edge almost touched the floor; it bowed and swayed; then it began to turn. Quickly and more quickly it span round, and moved towards the window, where Captain Perth stood staring at it. Miss Graham took her hands off, and went to a distance; but it did not stop. As truly as I am telling this story, it did not stop. It waltzed round, and drove him into the window. He slipped past it, and strode over to the fireplace. It turned, and came across the room at him, spinning wildly. "Stop the thing," he shouted, forgetting all his dignity.*

Miss Graham smiled a curious smile, and seated herself on the top of the sofa. Archie rushed forward, and caught hold of the table, commanding it to stop; but he might as well have called to a railway train. It twisted itself out of his hands, and made for Captain Perth again. He shuffled off to the other end of the room; it was strange that he never seemed to think of going out of it, but he could not take his eyes off his pursuer.

"Stop it, *do* stop it, someone!" he cried, in a perfect agony.

"Miss Graham," I said peremptorily, "you can. Oblige me by stopping it."

"I cannot, indeed," she replied, with the utmost coolness. "It is not my influence that is upon it."

The table was after him again, and with a regular howl of terror, he rushed up to us. Instantly we all vacated the sofa, and fled out at the door, which was close to it. The disturbance brought up

* I vouch for the truth of this incident: I have no explanation to offer.—V. S.

Annabella and Mr. Mowbray. What they saw through the open door in the empty room was the terrible Captain Perth, poised on the round slippery end of a leather-covered sofa, the perspiration running down his cheeks, and his eyes wild with fright; while a round table was twirling and bowing before him in the most grotesque fashion, and apparently making frantic efforts to get up on the sofa.

Annabella walked straight up to the table, and laid her hands on it. "Be quiet," she said. The wild tiltings subsided, the spinning ceased, and a mild and orderly breakfast-table replaced the mahogany fiend.

"Can we put this back in its place, Mr. Rintoul?" she asked.

Archie came forward, and so did Mr. Mowbray—for which I thought the better of him—and they carried it away.

"Now, papa," she said calmly; "the rain is over, let us go home."

Captain Perth came down from his perch; I never saw a man look so foolish. I shook hands with him in the hall, and he went off at once, holding Annabella's arm, and seeming dazed. Caroline and Dora followed mutely.

Several days passed before Captain Perth was again seen by any of his neighbours, and when he began once more to go about as usual, he was a different man. Once, and for ever, he had been cowed, made ridiculous, humiliated in the presence of his family and his neighbours. He did not die of it, or even fall into bad health, but he never held up his head again. Even his ill-temper became merely querulous, and no longer formidable. When Annabella quietly married Mr. Mowbray, she asked no permission, but simply told him of her intention. He only said "H'm! I suppose you must do as you please;" and, under Caroline's directions, ordered a *long* blue morning-coat, attired in which he relinquished his shadowy rights in her. Annabella now enjoys the reversion of the first Mrs. Mowbray's drawing-room and nursery; Dora pleases herself in everything; and Caroline rules her father with a rod of iron. Poor Mrs. Perth is avenged. But she could never have borne to see her Dagon prostrate, and I am glad that she does not know. For though I can give no explanation of the events of my first and last séance, I can never connect the vindictive vagaries of that demon table with her meek and patient spirit. Better — much better—that she should sleep and forget.

VERA SINGLETON.

A ROSE DISTILL'D.

By the Author of "Molly Bawn."

"BUT who is she? and where has she come from?" asks Mrs. Vyvyan, with uplifted brows and a slight acerbity of tone. She actually lays down her novel (the third volume, too) as she says this, as though honestly desirous of information, or scandal.

"She is a widow, I hear," replies her brother, lazily. He yawns, and pulls with languid affection the ears of the small terrier sitting on his knee.

"Oh! of course; they always *are* widows," said Mrs. Vyvyan.

"Well. Why shouldn't they be? Fellows *will* die, you know. By-the-bye, did you hear about Fred's parsnips? He ——"

"Never mind the parsnips. Fred" (Fred is her husband) "is always making an ass of himself about one thing or the other. Tell me what else you have heard about this new-comer."

"About Mrs. Stamer? Not much. She has taken The Holmes, it appears, and has one little daughter. I know nothing more of her, and I shouldn't have known that if Daventry hadn't regularly button-holed me, and made me listen to him."

"How odd it is. That sort of woman has *always* only one child, and it is *never* a son. Why don't they have two? and why not a boy, sometimes?"

"Sometimes they have. I know a widow who has three little sons."

"A widow in society, no doubt. But this Mrs. Stamer has apparently no connections, no antecedents (that can be safely introduced), in fact, *nothing!*"

"She has money; and the best place to be had now in the neighbourhood."

"I suppose," fretfully, "she will expect us to call."

"Let her expect, and don't call. Why should you? Stay at home, and so avoid this grievance."

"But if everybody else calls, I shan't like to feel I am the one ill-natured person in the parish. Why on earth can't she say who she is, or mention a cousin, or a sister, or an aunt? Charlotte Grynde saw her yesterday, and says she is too pretty to be proper."

"If ugliness is a patent of respectability, Miss Grynde is all one could possibly desire," says Captain Blackwood. "She is, beyond all doubt, too proper to be pretty."

"Charlotte is trying, certainly, but I think she is a good soul," says Mrs. Vyvyan, carelessly, of her "dearest friend." "Stamer—Stamer. It is a good name enough, but perhaps assumed."

"'What's in a name?'" quotes her brother. "We have all heard about the rose, you know, and considering what we have heard she must be superior to any rose. If her surname was Brown, Jones, or Robinson, it wouldn't take the lustre out of her eyes, or add an inch to her nose—which I hear is pure Greek. By-the-bye, she has got the most questionable christian name."

"How, questionable?"

"It is almost improper," says Captain Blackwood, with a faint laugh. The day is warm, and laughter of the pronounced sort is beyond him. "She calls herself 'Audrey.' It sounds stagey, doesn't it? A woman who respected herself wouldn't go round with that name, would she? It's so disgracefully out of the common."

"A *name* signifies very little," says Mrs. Vyvyan, severely, who doesn't like being ridiculed even by a pet brother.

"Look here, Pussy," says Captain Blackwood: "Don't you be the first to taboo this poor little woman. She is only your own age, I hear, twenty-seven" (Mrs. Vyvyan is thirty-two), "so don't be hard on her. No doubt she has had bad times enough, without our coming down heavily upon her."

"I shan't do anything, of course, until other people move," says Mrs. Vyvyan, much mollified by that happy allusion to her—or rather Mrs. Stamer's age. The *other people* mean the Bishop, Mrs. Bishop, and Lady Mary Gore.

"And don't be too hasty even then," advises her brother, who is a good-natured young man, some three years her junior. "By-the-bye, talking of haste, I would take three inches off her tail, if I were you. You shouldn't delay another hour."

"Off *whose* tail?" startled.

"Gilly's. These Irish terriers don't look the thing with tails."

"Oh! the dog," says his sister, in a relieved tone. "I thought you were speaking of ——. I don't understand dogs, but take off Gilly's tail if you like, only—don't hurt her."

"Here comes Charlotte the Grynder: so I'll retire," says Captain Blackwood, glancing down the avenue through the open window. "She has got on her new black silk, so she means mischief. I won't have any tea this evening, thanks, unless you will be so good as to send it to the library. And, Pussy, a last word: if you really want to make your friend thoroughly happy, just expatiate on what you have heard of Mrs. Stamer's beauty."

A sound outside, a well-known semi-masculine step, and Captain Blackwood flies to regions dull—but inaccessible.

In spite of its many spinsters, society in Pullingham is eminently good-natured. Just now it is grieving excessively at having to hold back the right hand of fellowship from the stranger at The Holmes. But as The Larches have not gone to see her in their landau, The Elms have not dared to show her the light of their countenance in

their phaeton; and so on in the lesser degrees of pride, each member shrinking from the initiative in this matter.

At the end of a week, however, things come to a climax. The Bishop, a wonderfully unworldly man as bishops go, waking to a sense of the situation, drags himself away from the contemplation of his strawberry beds, and persuades Mrs. Bishop to put on her best bonnet, and come with him to make a formal call at The Holmes. This, poor woman, she does in fear and trembling: Lady Mary Gore has not as yet signified her intention of visiting the new comer, and Lady Mary is own sister to a duke! Supposing Mrs. Bishop should be putting her foot in it! Awful thought!

She feels a little faint, but having donned the bonnet in obedience to her lord, ascends the Noah's Ark they call a coach, and drives away with him to call upon this unknown woman who may or may *not* (here the feeling of faintness returns) be respectable: she almost weeps, and certainly scolds all the way there, and finally arrives just in time to meet Lady Mary departing.

Yes, there *is* balm in Gilead! Again, the sun shines, the flowers emit the sweetest perfume. All is changed. She presses Lady Mary's hand affectionately, and murmurs "how glad she is to see that dear Lady Mary *too*" (the "too" heavily emphasised) "has espoused this poor creature's cause, and has not gone over to those who seem bent on ignoring her presence in the county."

Lady Mary nods and blinks, and gives it as her opinion that the "poor creature" is absolutely charming, and goes on her way rejoicing, with a large smile upon her broad, ugly, lovely old face.

After the Bishop, Mrs. Vyvyan calls, and after that there is a rush from minor quarters to see the pretty widow, who has dropped down amongst them, as if from the skies.

They find her very good to look at; *so* good that somebody says she cannot be bad, her face is so angelic; yet everyone, in his or her secret heart, feels that there *may* be something in her past not altogether—well—you understand: and this adds piquancy to the acquaintance, though all would have died rather than confess it.

There is one great charm about Mrs. Stamer. She is always at home, and always to be seen, so everyone can gratify his curiosity about her. She is ever to be found seated in a huge rocking-chair in her drawing-room, with the windows open (it is hottest, brightest June), an immense peacock fan in her little jewelled hand, and a very tiny child at her feet.

She is dressed in deepest mourning—not crape exactly, but heavy black for all that, relieved here and there by some handsome jet, and old lace frillings at the throat and wrists. The child is in mourning, too: yet she tells everyone she has been a widow for a little more than three years. On her left hand, as in duty bound (this is Miss Grynde's remark not mine), she wears a plain wedding ring; on her right two magnificent diamonds, worth a small fortune. Miss Grynde

is further of opinion that diamond rings of such value on a widow of unknown fame—are not respectable!

Pullingham is festive: it is even lavish in its hospitality. Invitations to stately afternoons, pompous dinners, and frivolous evenings have been showered upon Mrs. Stamer—all in vain. She has politely declined to join the dance in any form whatsoever. Indeed, she lets it be understood that she means to abjure gaiety, and devotes herself exclusively to the cultivation of her child.

The child is a decided feature in her programme. There have been, and there are, pretty children in Pullingham, but anything so ethereally lovely as the little fairy who calls Mrs. Stamer "mamma" has never yet been seen there. She is a minute thing of five years, with yellow hair that encircles her like a cloud, and out of which gleam dark eyes and crimson lips, a complexion like a veritable white rose, and a wistful expression that must have come with her from her own domain of Faerie.

To-day, being just a trifle cooler than its fellows, Mrs. Vyvyan drives her ponies down to The Holmes, and entering the shaded drawing-room there, literally lays siege to Mrs. Stamer, who is looking as slender and cool and calm as though the heat is not 90° in the shade, without even one sighing breeze to relieve its intensity. The flowers are drooping; the streamlets run slowly; gentle Zephyrus has forgotten the earth!

"You *must* come to us this evening," says Mrs. Vyvyan impetuously. "You must indeed. Why, you have been here for a full month, and never put in an evening anywhere. It is almost uncivil of you."

"Oh! not uncivil," says Mrs. Stamer gently.

"Well then, unkind. We wish to make you one of us, and you won't have it," says Mrs. Vyvyan, who had been the first to traduce her and the second to adore her. "Besides, to-night I want you."

"There are so many others," says the pale widow, with a faint smile. "In your charming circle a stranger—such as I am—cannot possibly be missed. A stranger however who feels your kindness deeply, and hardly knows how she can repay it." This last, with extreme grace, and a soft, undulating movement, and a sweeter smile.

"I know," says Mrs. Vyvyan briskly. "There is nothing to repay: but if *you think* there is, come to me to-night. It will be an early party; so early that I will ask you to bring the little one with you; my May and Edith will look after her."

At this, a faint little plaintive voice that seems to come from the mother's feet, makes itself heard. The child has been sitting on a low footstool buried in one of Mrs. Molesworth's charming tales, but the last sentence spoken has become English to her. She rises and throws her bare soft arms around her mother's neck.

"Oh, mamma, *do*, *do* take me! I have never been to a real party, and I want to play with Edith." Mrs. Stamer is not proof



M. ELLEN STAPLES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"MRS. STAMER LEANING BACK IN HER SEAT, WITH EYES TURNED UPON THE LOVELY LIGHT, ADDS TO IT ANOTHER CHARM."

against this solicitation. It was indeed a lucky hour when Mrs. Vyvyan thought of asking the child.

"But my pet ——" begins the widow, faintly.

"Say *yes*," entreats the golden-haired elf with authority—at which Mrs. Vyvyan laughs.

"You *will* come," she says, hopefully. "That is right. Dulce," to the child, "I owe you a debt of gratitude. The fact is, the General is to be with us. He is staying with the Claremont people, and he is such a charming man, I should quite like you to meet him."

"I will come to you," sighs Mrs. Stamer, unwillingly. It is terrible to her to emerge from her seclusion, but she feels, in this instance, it will be too unfriendly to refuse. And if she has to live her life amongst these people, the sooner she accepts their ways the better, if only for her child's sake.

"Now that is right," says Mrs. Vyvyan; and she presses a little kiss upon Mrs. Stamer's pale cheek, as she takes her departure.

As Mrs. Stamer enters the reception rooms at the Grange, she finds them fuller than she had anticipated: where all these people can have come from is the first thought. Pullingham, in her eyes, had not appeared large enough to contain one-half of them, yet after a careful scrutiny she confesses to herself that no face here is unfamiliar. Everyone seems a little surprised, and a good deal glad to see her. Her child is caressed and petted to her heart's content, until May and Edith Vyvyan carry her off bodily. The hostess rustles up to Mrs. Stamer, and makes much of her, and says something about George; whereupon Captain Blackwood asserts himself, and takes Mrs. Stamer to the upper end of the room, where a window opens upon a scene replete with moonbeans and a shimmering lake.

Somebody is singing. The voice is not loud or powerful, but it is sweet, and it thrills one's soul only to hear it. Mrs. Stamer sighs profoundly, and sinking into a low chair, tells herself she may probably be happy here for an hour or two.

The moon is streaming in upon her; the gardens below are all aflood with its light; the tiny wavelets on the lake seem to be sobbing and swaying through very ecstacy, so loving is the touch Diana gives them. A faint glimpse of the distant ocean, sparkling and scintillating in the clear rays, can be caught through the branches of the tall firs, that stand out jet black against the pallid sky. The perfume of many flowers creeps up, to render a perfect scene more perfect, and Mrs. Stamer leaning back in her seat, with eyes sympathetic turned upon the lovely light, adds to it another charm. Captain Blackwood is not talking; for this she is secretly grateful. He is contenting himself with a prolonged survey of the faultless face beside him, that, calm and quiet as marble, yet suggests such possibilities of passionate feeling.

Then the song comes to an end, and a little murmur of admiration

follows it ; *that* dies away, and after it comes a fluttering : at the lower end of the long room there stands the entrance door and Blackwood glancing in its direction says, lazily :

"The Claremont people at last, *and* the General !"

Mrs. Stamer, thus roused from her reverie, turns to her companion. "*The* General," she says with a slight touch of amusement in her tone ; and then, as if impelled by some absurd curiosity, she rises and glances down the room to where the last comers stand talking to Mrs. Vyvyan.

A tall, soldierly-looking man with clear-cut features, a heavy moustache, and very mournful eyes, is most conspicuous amongst the group. He is grave to a fault ; but now, even as she looks, he smiles, and his smile is full of beauty, and transforms him in one instant from middle-age to youth.

"He is younger than one would expect in a General," says Captain Blackwood, without any particular interest in his tone, "though real live Generals, to tell the truth, are few and far between in Pullingham. He—By Jove !"

He is barely in time to catch Mrs. Stamer in his arms, as she sways forward and falls in a dead faint : caused by the heat, no doubt.

It is the simplest thing in the world to get her out of the room, and upstairs to Mrs. Vyvyan's bed without a sensation of any kind. One or two of the women guests, seeing what has happened, go with her, and as for the rest, they know nothing of the mishap that has befallen the mistress of the Holmes, until several hours later.

Time flies. The General is naturally the hero of the hour, coming fresh from Afghanistan. By-and-bye, the young people take to dancing in the grand old hall, and the General—who has laughingly declined to trip it unless he can find a partner of his own age, and what woman will acknowledge to that?—steps out on the balcony, and gazes thoughtfully upon the sleeping garden. All is peace !—a great calm has fallen on the world. It seems almost as if ever-ready sin has sunk to rest: the lake ripples; the moonbeams shiver; the flowers sleep; no sound comes to move the intense quiet of the hour. But what is this?

A little form — is it angel or fairy?— comes slowly up to the General across the stone balcony. Pausing near him, it lifts its large eyes confidently to his face. It is the child Dulce, who has grown wearied with her play, and would fain be at rest within her snowy bed. He can touch her if he will but put forth his hand. Involuntarily he does so, and drawing her to him, gazes into her small face.

As he does so, his own changes : a heavy pallor shines through the bronze an Indian sun has laid upon his cheek. Raising her he takes her impetuously to where the light from the many lamps within must fall upon her, and illumine her baby features. *Who* is she like?—*Who?*—alas ! too well he knows. His breath comes with painful rapidity, a film gathering before his eyes shuts out from them the little face he wants to see.

"Your name, child, your name?" he says hoarsely, so hoarsely indeed that the words are lost to her. She shakes her head wearily, and looks with the sleepy, but uncertain interest of a moment upon the gay scene within. The General's eyes are wild, yet, strange to say, the child betrays no fear. She only nestles a little closer to him, and slips an arm round his neck, and lays one of the fairest heads in Christendom upon his shoulder.

"I am tired," she says. "I wish mamma would take me home."

"Where is your mother?" asks he, eagerly.

"In the drawing-room," replies the child, as her little head grows heavier. "If you see her, call her."

The General casts a piercing glance around the room. He can see nothing that may alleviate the uneasiness that has full possession of his breast. "Tell me your name, my little one," he says gently.

"Dulce Stamer," replies the drowsy fairy. After which confession, she sinks into placid sleep within his arms.

Finding a seat near him, the General slowly takes possession of it. It is deep in the embrasure of the old-fashioned window, and is hidden from the room by curtains that hang heavily. Here he sits nursing the child contentedly; with infinite care he so disposes the little rounded limbs and dainty body that her sleep may be the sounder. With unspeakable tenderness he gazes upon the silken lashes and rosy lips, through which the breath of life ebbs and flows calmly, evenly.

So an hour passes, and then the curtains are parted, and Mrs. Vyvyan looking in, stares at the tableau that presents itself to her view. A veteran and an infant! If incongruous, it is at least charming.

"General!" she whispers, with a low laugh. "Is it *so* you have been entertained? Who made you a nurse to-night?"

"She came to me of her own accord," says the General, somewhat proudly; "she gave herself into my keeping with the most flattering trust. If you don't want her, don't take her from me. I have seldom been so happy as I have been to-night."

"That is very sweet of you," says Mrs. Vyvyan; "but I must let you off duty now. Dulce's mother waits her. She is going home."

"Then, let me take her to her carriage," says the General, strangely loath to surrender his little friend to anyone.

"No, no," says Mrs. Vyvyan earnestly. "Mrs. Stamer has not been well, and so wants to get away quietly. A strange face might upset her." So saying, she stoops, and lifting Dulce with the utmost gentleness, bears her away from the General.

"Did you enjoy yourself, darling?" asks Mrs. Stamer, as she and the child are rolling home swiftly beneath the light of the quiet stars, through the scented lanes, heavy with dew and moonshine.

"Yes, *so* much," says the little one. "But went to sleep; and he was very good to me, and nursed me *so* comfortably."

"Who did, darling?" she asks indifferently.

"The strange man."

"*What* man?" cries her mother, with as much force as though someone had struck her. A passionate throb takes her heart; all her pulses beat tumultuously.

"The tall, thin man," says the child, simply; "they called him the General!"

"Ah!" says Mrs. Stamer. She inhales her breath quickly, making a sound like a sob, and leans back in the carriage.

It is now next day; and again Apollo is on high, saluting the earth with his fire. Last night the General slept little, but asked many questions. He had kept one of the Clares (on their return from the Grange) in the smoking-room until an unconscionable hour, probing him unmercifully about The Holmes and its inmates, until the poor young man's lids fell down over his eyes. Then the General, seeing no more was to be gained from him, generously sent him to bed. But bed for the General that night meant nothing less than torment.

Something had happened to wake within him memories of a past, now three years old. He had not been General Steyne then, but a colonel, and life at that time had shown him its sweetest and its bitterest sides. He had been wrong then, he knows that now—he had been wrong, indeed, all through, but only discovered his error when too late. And last night—a few hours ago, a little baby face, a tiny rose-tinged thing, framed in a glory of hair, yellow as uncut corn, had raised within him a demon of remorse and longing that will not be laid.

This morning, breakfast is a mockery to him, so unnerved is he by his long vigil. He fidgets secretly, whilst the others eat their kidneys and toast, and laugh over last night's proceedings; and when decency allows, he rises, and, finding a hat, walks quickly down the stone steps of Claremont, and turns eagerly in the direction that leads to The Holmes. Yes. Now at once and for ever, he will get rid of the gnawing anxiety, the consuming hope that has been destroying him for hours; and when he has walked two miles, and his heart has begun to beat feverishly, he comes face to face with Mrs. Stamer, at her entrance gate.

For a long minute they gaze at each other in a silence that may be felt. The General breaks it. "I was not mistaken, then," he says, in a low tone.

"No? and what then?" says Mrs. Stamer, in a cold, clear voice, full of defiance. She raises her eyes proudly to his, though in very truth her soul is fainting within her.

"After three long years of incessant search, to find you here—of all places—unawares!" he says, gazing earnestly at her. He seems lost in astonishment; he cannot, though the doing so would be a

relief to him, avert his eyes from the fair but wrathful face, that returns his glance so steadily.

"Well, you *have* found me," she says, still defiant; "and now what have you gained by your discovery?"

"Not much, perhaps, in your eyes; but to me this accidental meeting has brought comfort that is almost overpowering. I have *seen* you—you are alive and well. It is a great deal. You cannot, of course, understand *how much*—and besides all this, *I have held the child in my arms!* She slept *here*" (laying his hand upon his heart with a rather simple gesture). "She had her little arms around my neck; she was *happy* with me."

"My daughter told me you had been kind to her," says Mrs. Stamer, coldly. She speaks as one might who is acknowledging a small kindness done to her by an acquaintance of a day. The settled distance of her manner cuts him to the heart.

"It was nothing," he says, his colour rising, his voice growing tremulous; "nothing to you, at least; but it filled me with a joy I have not known for years—for three long years. "I can still feel the pressure of her little head."

"Dulce was grateful to you," says Dulce's mother, icily. "I regret she cannot thank you in person."

"'Dulce.' She was Audrey once," exclaims he, quickly.

"I changed all that when I changed —— many other things. Dulce suits her best—*my sweet!*" As the last words fall from her lips they soften them, and her whole face grows alight with the rapturous glow born of the most eternal love of all!

"May I not see her?" asks the General, very humbly. "Surely I have *some* claim to ——"

"She belongs to *me*," says Mrs. Stamer, interrupting him with some passion. Is there not fear mingled with it? She turns aside from him, as though his presence is no longer tolerable.

"You are in mourning," he says, quickly, bent on detaining her for even one more precious minute.

"Sombre colours become those who are widowed," replies she, with her eyes on the ground.

"But the child?" exclaims he in deep agitation. "Last night I noticed it—she, too, is in mourning?"

"It is only right she should be so; she has lost her father," says Mrs. Stamer. She moves away from him to where the giant elms are throwing dark shadows on the grass, and soon is lost to sight amidst their gloom.

Looking older, greyer, the General goes down the dusty road, lost in saddest thought; coming to a stile, he steps over it, and enters a field, green as emerald, at the side of which a little stream runs gurgling with tremulous glee, as it rushes to meet the great ocean, that lies in a white mist far below. A mighty fir uprears itself in the corner of this field, and, leaning against it, the General gives himself

up to the most miserable reflections, when a sound comes to him. A fresh, sweet sound, that thrills him to his heart's core, and uplifts it to know that even for him there is joy upon the blessed earth.

It is a child's voice singing; and the child herself is coming to him across the sunlit sward, with her dark eyes all aglow, and her lips parted, and her hair flying behind her, like a golden glory. She has crimson poppies in her hands, and is holding them close to her little bosom, as though filled with love for them, as she speeds along. She has escaped from nurse, and in the delicious sense of freedom, is chanting aloud a merry lilt.

But even as the General gazes upon her, a change passes over the little face. As if to prove that ever pain must mingle with our dearest gladness here, the child pauses in her happy run, her song ceases. The small face puckers ominously; and, sinking on the ground, she bursts into a flood of tears.

In a moment the General is at her side, has lifted her in his strong arms, and is asking her what has happened. He presses her tangled yellow head against his breast, and betrays such genuine grief at her mishap that the child is half consoled. He may be unlearned in childhood's ways, yet it is with a touch that a woman might have envied, because of its gentleness, that he sets about discovering the damage done.

Dulce is not shy. She has ceased crying; and now, lifting her angelic eyes to his, she points sorrowfully to her little rounded bare leg, as though demanding sympathy. It is a small affair, after all—the sting of a venomous nettle, that has raised a pink flush upon her tender skin. The General stoops and kisses the soft injured limb with the greatest tenderness.

He even removes the shoe and sock from her foot, with a view to ascertaining whether or not the wicked nettle has penetrated through the strong kid. Then with an awkwardness unrivalled, he draws on the sock again, and after a fierce and protracted battle with it, reduces the button of the shoe to subjection. Dulce is delighted with him. She has quite adopted him by this time, and is sitting without the slightest regard for decency with her arms tightly clasped round his neck, and her cheek rubbing its velvet softness against his.

"Does he know mamma? Does he love her?"

The General flushes. "Yes, he has seen mamma. Does *she* love her?"

"Oh yes. Mamma is beautiful and must be loved. She, Dulce, loves her most, though, when she is crying; and she is often crying, poor mamma. Then Dulce comforts her. Mamma says she is her only comfort."

"And Dulce's papa?"

"Papa is dead. Mamma has said so. He is buried, down, down," pointing to the ground. "But mamma told her only yesterday that she must love him always, even though she may never see him till she

goes up to Heaven. He was the best man that ever lived," says Dulce, sweetly, as if repeating an old lesson, looking straight into the General's abashed eyes.

"He was *not*," says the General suddenly, losing his head.

"But he *was*," declares the child indignantly, regarding him with a sudden accession of disfavour. "Mamma says so."

"Mamma!"

"Yes, my mamma—and she knows. You knew him too," says the little one, with all a child's singular astuteness. "Tell me about him; was he big?——Tall?"

She has forgotten her anger of a moment since, and is now gazing at him with one of her sweetest smiles.

"Yes," says the General.

"And with grey hair, like yours," stroking his grizzly locks.

"Yes, just like mine. He was old, too," says the General, with a touch of ill-suppressed bitterness.

"Had he nice eyes, like yours?"

"Very like mine, my angel." And then the child tightens her arms about him, and entreats him to come home with her to her own house, and she will show him her pretty garden, and her ducks, and her little soft yellow chicks, and the rose that has bloomed upon her own tree.

But the General declares he cannot come to-day; some other time. He breaks off abruptly in the middle of a sentence, and bends his head upon his breast. Growing frightened, the little one tries to raise it, and she sees that tears are running down the General's cheeks, and that he is crying.

To-day, as usual, Mrs. Stamer is sitting in her huge rocking-chair, wafting her big fan to and fro. Her lids have drooped slightly over her eyes in true drowsy fashion; the action of her wrist grows languid; she is in full enjoyment of an afternoon as sultry and free from air of any kind as one living for years in the far East can possibly desire.

Yet there is a faint curve about her perfect lips that is hardly happy, a touch of pallor in her soft cheeks that suggests mournful, nay, even hateful thought.

"General Steyne," says a servant, opening the door suddenly, so detaching her from a painful past, as to bring her to a yet more painful present—to judge by the cloud that covers her fair face.

But the servant's eye is on her, and so she forces herself to rise, and bow coldly to her visitor, and say "How d'ye do," as quietly as if the heart in her body is not beating wildly, madly with surprise and indignation, and something else, perhaps.

Then the servant vanishes; and as he does so her enforced courtesy vanishes too, and with passionate contempt and anger she turns to the General.

"*You!* And here!" she says. It is as if she would gladly have

said much more, but that her strength is insufficient for her. She is literally consumed by the emotion that is making her bosom rise and fall tumultuously.

"I couldn't help it," says the General. It is a perfectly puerile excuse, and at the least very humble—*so* humble that it would have disarmed most women's anger. Unhappily it has only the effect of increasing Mrs. Stamer's.

"That you should *dare* to seek me," she says, with a little gasp, "to even *look* upon my face again: to——"

"It was that that brought me," interrupts he, eagerly. So eagerly that, for the moment, he appears almost a young man. "To look upon your face once more—for the last time, perhaps. That I am unworthy to do it, I know; but I risked everything, even your anger. It was an overpowering desire; I could not conquer it." He speaks somewhat incoherently, and when his voice fails him, there is a pause.

"Now that you have gratified your desire, I shall be glad if you will go," says Mrs. Stamer, drawing her breath in a somewhat laboured fashion. She is standing always, and has one hand upon a chair near her, as though to steady herself. Her face is white as death, her eyes are all afire.

"Audrey! Have you forgotten all!" cries he, in anguish; "all our happy past: you used to say you were happy then. Must my one crime be as a curse upon my whole life? Is pardon impossible?"

"Quite impossible!"

"Could you not *try* to forgive?"

"For what?" she asks sternly. "To love again—to be again undone? *No!* I have wisdom now, where I had only childish trust before. Unheard, you condemned me. Another's voice, the voice of a common slanderer, was more precious in your ears than mine. You believed me false to you—*false!* How can I forgive, or forget *that?* You have sown; you now reap; and all is at an end between us."

"Even memory?" asks he, despairingly. "Are there *no* hours you can look back upon, and wish——"

"I *never* look back," cries she, vehemently, putting up her hand as though to ward off some fatal blow. "*Never!* I *will* not."

She is strangely agitated. She betrays a forced determination not to be won over by any argument, however specious.

"If, then, for the future I am to be nothing to you," says the General, in a low tone that he strives hard to reduce to calmness, "tell me—what of the child?"

At this a terrible fear takes possession of her. Her lips part, but no sound comes from them. She looks at him with a dumb entreaty in her beautiful eyes, that amounts almost to agony.

Will he take the child from her? Has he the power to do so? Will he cruelly deprive her of the little creature who has been to her for years as her very heart's blood? Must she live without the sweet companionship that has grown necessary to her, the fond baby kisses

that have rendered her sad life not only bearable but almost to be desired?

"You will not take the child from me!" she says in a dying tone. Her face grows absolutely grey with fear—involuntarily she lays her hand upon her throat, as one might who is in danger of suffocation.

"No, no, no," says the General, vehemently, her evident distrust of him causing him even keener anguish than what has gone before. "The child is yours. I surrender all claim, no matter what it costs me. I owe you so much. I will do nothing to wound you. You have suffered enough at my hands already. I shall do whatever you wish in the future. It rests in your own hands. If you tell me to go now, I shall obey you."

"Then, go," exclaims she: and his face changes perceptibly.

"And if you tell me never to return—if you think that will be for your happiness," his voice trembles, "you shall *still* be obeyed!" Though he has forced himself to utter the words, they are almost unintelligible. Is she merciless, or has she indeed lost all love for him? Has his one act of unfaith destroyed for ever the hold he once had upon her heart?

"It will be better so," she says, her tone uncertain. She has risen to her feet, and is staring at him with yearning eyes. Is this indeed to be the end? Is she, by two or three words to drive him for ever from her presence? How tall he looks, how grand, how soldier-like, and—he is her husband—and once—*once* she loved him wildly. The General, drawing himself up to his full height, which is magnificent, walks to the door. Has he not given his word to obey her?

In this world how many great things hinge upon a bare circumstance. But for an interruption he might have gone forth and never looked again upon the face dearest to him. Even as he opens the door, Dulce comes rushing in with flying hair, and sparkling eyes, and happy crimson lips, glad with smiles.

"Oh, nurse told me you were here," she cries, as she precipitates herself upon the General, and impounds him on the spot.

"It is my general," she says glancing over her white, rounded shoulder at her mother, who seems turned into stone. The child is in a very rapture; she throws her little arms around his neck and smothers him with kisses.

"I guessed you would come. I told mamma I had asked you, and that I thought you would come: and you see," with a triumphant glance at her pale mother, "I was right."

"Quite right," says the General, very gently. "Yet you see, Dulce, my coming has been of no use. I must go now, even as *you* come."

"No, no," says the child hospitably. "Mamma, ask him to stay and have tea with us."

"I can't stay, indeed," says the poor General hurriedly.

"Mamma, make him," cries the anxious little voice. "I want to show him my new chickens."

"I shall be glad if you will stay," says Mrs. Stamer in a stifled tone. The sight of the child in his arms, with her pretty cheek pressed against his, is almost more than she can endure.

"There!" says Dulce, slipping out of his arms. "Now you *must* stay—and I shall run and tell Jackson to bring the tea at once."

In a moment she is gone. The General looks with some embarrassment at Mrs. Stamer, and sees that she has covered her face with her hands, and is crying silently, but passionately.

In a moment he is at her side; at her feet. "Audrey, Audrey," he cries imploringly. "Would it be possible to forgive!"

"No, no," sobs she, bitterly, but her voice is not unforgiving.

"Our whole lives must be influenced by this moment," says General Steyne, solemnly. "I implore you to think. I know I am unworthy of pardon, but if ——"

"Memory would come between us," whispers she, sadly.

"*Nothing* shall come between us! If so blessed a thing could happen, as that you would take me back into your heart, no earthly power should separate us again."

He waits with beating pulse for her reply. Lifting her streaming eyes to his, she says "You are really sorry?" It is a foolish question, but very womanly, and it fills the General with contrition.

"Alas!" he says, mournfully, "need you ask me that question, my beloved? I doubt if even the great joy of being forgiven by you—if that joy be mine, Audrey—can altogether blot out the recollection of these three past miserable years, during which remorse has been my companion day and night."

"I will drive out that companion," murmurs she with quivering lips, yielding to his sweet caress. "My husband, now that I am your own again, all evil thoughts will fly from you."

"Here comes tea," cries Dulce, dancing into the room before the solemn footman, who is following her with the tray.

"Is it," says her mother, with a tremulous smile. "Good child! Now, will you go and tell cook, that General Steyne will dine with us at half-past seven. No, Jackson, no, I want Miss Dulce to take the message herself!"

"GIN A BOGIE MEET A BOGIE."

VISION THE FIRST.—HERS.

I SAW him for the first time at mess; when we were entertaining the Southwoldshire Militia. He had been absent on leave when I exchanged into the Royal Denbigh, and I knew no more of him than his name, Major Egbert Eyken, an exasperating name enough, but suggestive of nothing to my mind except a passing wonder if he were one of the Eykens of Derridown, old friends of mine.

There he was in person, sitting opposite to me; a fresh-coloured, broad-chested, small-waisted figure; with a thick, brown moustache and large round eyes, a very model of military beauty, from the nursery-maid's point of view.

"Yes: that's Eyken," said my neighbour. "Man with a story, you know. Looks like it, doesn't he?"

"Well, no, I can't say he does," I replied, glancing across at the plateful of gooseberry-tart and cream which the Major was putting "away" with evident enjoyment. "Not a tragic one, anyhow."

"Can't say. It's a mystery. Something about a girl, of course. Think he's under a vow, myself."

I looked again at the Major with greater interest; at the same moment he raised his eyes to mine and an odd flash of recognition or sympathy passed between us. I felt I must have known him before, though when or where, I could not say—and was fore-ordained to see a good deal more of him. The same mysterious impression thrilled through him at the same moment with curious results, as I was afterwards to learn; *then* I only noticed him start, stare good-humouredly at me and fill and empty a glass of sherry rapidly, glancing furtively again at me over his napkin as he wiped his moustache.

"Just look out for Eyken at eleven to-night," Montmorenci-Smith said to me in an undertone, as we rose from table.

After dinner Eyken and I made acquaintance. He *was* one of the Eykens of Derridown, and knew some of my people slightly. He was not very brilliant, but pleasant and inclined to be friendly, and we talked till Montmorenci-Smith came up to suggest whist. I hated it, but Eyken agreed readily enough. Smith—who hadn't asked him, by the way—hesitated for a moment and then went off with him, giving me a queer look as he turned away.

In half an hour he was back again. "Look here, Breye, you *must* come. Eyken has bolted in the middle of a rubber, and old Jervoise is furious. Eyken's way, you know—*says his nose is bleeding!*"

"Well, why shouldn't it be?"

"Oh! I say! *It won't stop to-night. It's past eleven.*

I rose reluctantly. "I suppose I must, if you want me: but what's the joke about eleven o'clock and Eyken? I don't see it yet."

"That's the mystery that none of us have been able to find out."

I looked inquisitively at Eyken's door as I passed it that night. It was closed, but a beam of light shot through the keyhole and a cheerful scent of tobacco wafted into the passage. "Queer," I said to myself as I mused over the events of the evening on my pillow. "But I can call on Mrs. Montmorenci-Smith to-morrow."

Very little went on in the regiment that was not known to Mrs. Montmorenci-Smith. Though but a bride of some two months, she had become possessed of more information respecting the ways and doings of every man in it than the greyest veteran amongst us. She was a bright, baby-faced little creature, with soft kittenish ways and innocent looks that would coax and twist the most compromising bits of scandal out of one, without committing herself to a single statement. I "looked in" casually next day at afternoon tea-time. Luck favoured me. She was alone, and inclined to chat and be amused. I told her two precious little bits of gossip while she sipped her tea, and then dropped Eyken's name into the conversation, lightly and warily as a delicate fly on a trout-stream.

"Do you know him?" she asked. "I mean intimately. Any better than everybody else does?"

"I know a great deal about him," I replied, discreetly.

Her eyes sparkled. "Poor man, how he does get himself talked about! You don't believe all you hear, do you, Mr. Breyebrook?"

"Some of it is certainly true," I observed, more diplomatically than before. "Tell me what you want to know, Mrs. Smith, and perhaps—without betraying confidence—I may suggest an explanation."

"What! you know what he does with himself every night? How did you find out?"

"I can go into no details, even to you. Are you sure that your husband knows no more than yourself?"

"Nevyl? oh dear, no! The regiment has been talking of Major Eyken's queer ways for a long while. He never goes to a ball, though he'll go anywhere for an afternoon's dance; won't act, though he can do so quite well, except in some little opening piece; and the Colonel has been quite put out at the pointed way in which he leaves them all at once on guest nights. All sorts of devices have been tried to make him overstay the time."

"With success?"

"That's the aggravating part; when they did succeed, nothing happened."

"And so the marvel collapses! I have an old aunt somewhere, who is never anywhere but in her bed by 10.30. I have known one or two other people afflicted with the same peculiarity, but it never gained them any special reputation."

"This is not the same thing at all," protested my fair hostess,

wondering whether I was laughing at her. "If I could only tell you half I have heard! He exchanged to us from the 4th, and I've a cousin in the regiment who says he poisoned somebody he was engaged to. Don't you know the queer trick he has of looking all round him suddenly, and giving a little quick jerk to one shoulder? Nevyl says—but you'll promise never to mention it—that when he was on duty, he always used to turn out the guard at ten o'clock, and send his subaltern later: and if there's any talk about ghosts, or anything of that sort, he gets up and leaves the room."

"In the library at Breyebrook," I was beginning, when just then a Captain and Mrs. Carver were announced, and I came away.

I regarded the haunted Major with much curiosity for the next few days; and I had special opportunities for studying him, as he appeared most undeniably attracted to me. I remarked the nervous glance and odd little twitch that Mrs. Montmorenci-Smith had described; but otherwise found him undistinguishable from any other specimen of the British officer that I was in the habit of meeting, unless by a certain openness and simplicity of nature that rendered his connection with a mystery the deepest part of it.

Little as I guessed it, a revelation was on its way to me. One evening Boldway took the opportunity of telling a long-winded story of an ancestral ghost that walked the family mansion in Midlandshire. Now, as we all knew that the name of Boldway's earliest-known progenitors still decorated the front of a "Magasin de Modes" in Liverpool, this was *rather* strong. Still, I shouldn't have cared to demolish him if the story had been a good one—but it wasn't.

"I suppose your people took that spectre in with the fixtures when they bought the house, my dear boy?" I observed. "If they did, it's an imposition, and you ought to have your remedy at law. Genuine old-established apparitions don't conduct themselves in that fashion."

Boldway looked wrathful. "You seem to know a lot about it!"

"I do," I replied, with calm superiority. "I myself was born on the last stroke of midnight one All Souls' Eve, which happened that year to fall on a Friday, and we all know what that implies."

Boldway didn't, so he smoked furiously in silence.

"Breyebrook, my father's place, is as well known for its legend as Glamis, and my mother was a Rossmore; and I believe the only known instance of a banshee having crossed the Channel occurred in our place on the occasion of my grandfather's death. I don't believe in ghosts myself, but can give you an example of the real thing, if you like."

Boldway nodded. And I had just finished a queer little ghostly anecdote that I picked up in Paris, when, looking up, I saw Eyken just leaving the room. I hadn't known he was there, and I don't know to this day what impelled me to jump up and follow him. He was making his way to his room, but looked back, hesitated, and waited for me.

"I say," he began, putting his arm in mine, "was all that true?"

"Every word—except the ghost. I don't believe in him yet—though others do."

"I should like you to hear—no, to see—if you don't mind. Won't you come and have a cigar in my room?" he ended, with a desperate effort.

A quarter to eleven was chiming from a neighbouring steeple. He opened his door and I followed him in. It was a cosy den enough; bigger and better furnished than mine. A bright fire blazed in the grate, with a big easy chair drawn up in front of it, and a large and elaborately-fitted toilet table stood in the window.

Eyken installed me in the big chair, turned up a duplex lamp on the chest of drawers, and lighted the candles on the mantelpiece and table; gave a tilt to the looking-glass that reversed it, leaving its blank back to the room, and seated himself opposite to me with his back to the lamp; all with a certain methodical speed that looked as if it were the usual routine of every night. He was certainly much agitated. His hand shook and his cheeks grew chalk-white. I affected to see nothing, selected a cigar with much deliberation from a box on the table, and went on talking, gazing steadily into the fire.

"I should like you to know a queer old uncle of mine, Eyken. He has a place up amongst the hills, that has stood since—well, say since there was a hill to stand upon. Of course it's full of ghosts."

"Why doesn't he demolish it?" asked Eyken absently.

"One doesn't exactly know how ghosts take an eviction; and perhaps it's not worth trying. Besides, they are company for him, and the servants don't object, once they find it is considered in the wages. It prevents the old place feeling so lonesome to know that the fair Ladye Grizel is combing her yellow locks at the top window in the ruined West Tower, or wicked Sir Morolt clattering up and down the courtyard in full armour on a stormy night."

"Ting," went the little clock over the fireplace as I spoke—"ting," eleven times, and I heard the Major's chair give a sudden creak.

"Now, if you can manage to run down with me, Eyken ——"

"Stop, Breye!" gasped Eyken. "Stop! and *look here!*"

I did look up suddenly, and my eyes met those of a woman.

She was standing behind him, her face turned to me, one hand resting heavily on his shoulder. Clad in trailing satin and lace, with white flowers in her hair, she clutched in her right hand the torn wisps and fragments of what might have been a bridal veil. Her left hand, seen distinctly against Eyken's scarlet jacket, was ringless.

I didn't believe in her, but I involuntarily rose from my chair.

"Ah! *you* see her?" sighed Eyken. "Then it *is* true!" and he gave his shoulder a violent jerk from under the phantom hand that had no effect whatever in dislodging it.

"Yes, I see *something*," I admitted. "But I am not prepared to say *what*." I walked round the table and screwed up the duplex,

which was giving a very queer light, though strong enough for ordinary purposes. The figure moved as I approached, making way for me. She was a little woman, with the smile of a cat, and a way of glancing out of the corners of her eyes that boded no good. I changed the place of the lamp and resumed my seat.

"Tell me how she comes to be here, Eyken?"

"That's what I've been wanting *you* to do from the time I first set eyes on you."

"On me!"

"Yes. The moment I saw you a queer feeling came over me. I said to myself, 'Here's a fellow who can help me, if any man alive can;' but I thought you should see her first. *I* can't, except in the looking-glass, and I take care not to do *that;* but I know she's here—confound her! I won't give her the satisfaction of taking her into society and letting her make me look like a fool there—not I—I just come away by myself, and smoke like fury."

"But you don't mean to say that —— thing —— comes here regularly?"

"Every night of my life. And stays from eleven till one."

I looked steadily and carefully at the apparition. The flame of the duplex was distinctly visible through her satin bodice, or through her arm as her position slightly changed. She bent over Eyken sometimes, putting her face mockingly near his, sometimes seeming to whisper in his ear, sometimes standing upright and menacing; always with the same vixenish smile. Her eyes were alive. The rest might have been thick vapour or some semi-transparent medium.

"A bride, I presume?"

"No, thank goodness, Breye! I escaped *that.* I'll begin at the beginning. It was at Scarborough, where I met her and her people, and we got acquainted somehow. I was rather lonely there, an innocent young cub of a subaltern, and was glad enough to have someone to talk to at the Spa, and at the hotel dances. She was ever so much older than I. Her people were very kind to me, and asked me to their place after leaving Scarborough, and I went and was made no end of, and told about dear Vi's cleverness, and her singing and her admirers; but not a word of dear Vi's little tempers; trust them for that. A chance of getting dear Vi disposed of, was worth any money. She was the eldest, and precious hot she made it for the family circle occasionally, especially when the next sister, Fanny, the plain one, got engaged. It was all hurried up somehow, before I quite understood what I had been doing. Old Bolsover wrote to my father, promising to make liberal settlements on us; he thought peace and quietness cheap at the money, I expect. My governor sent me his blessing by return of post. Everybody said what a lucky fellow I was. The whole Bolsover family made great fuss over us, and Viola was everything that was sweet and devoted. Once or twice some of the young ones came out with queer stories, but I set them down to

Fan, who was wroth at her sister getting an officer, while her Montague was only something wholesale in pickles and jams.

"Well, the happy day was fixed; my people came down to the Bolsovers and I got leave and was staying at the hotel near. A dinner was given the evening before the wedding and I sat next Vi. I thought she was queer; snappy and sulky; her dress didn't fit—the flowers hadn't come from London—a rich godmother had only sent her a butter knife—all sorts of things seemed to have gone wrong. When I got to the hotel I found that the flowers in question had been sent to me by mistake, and as I knew she wanted them, I thought I'd better run back with them at once, as it was still early. I took them, and also a present which had come from Georgie, a dear little cousin of mine. She had sent us a big photographic album with her own pretty face in the first page, and a nice little note inside for Vi. When I got back, I ran straight up to the boudoir. Such a row was going on! A dressmaker was on her knees settling the skirts of Vi's wedding gown; the maid was holding the pins and whimpering piteously, Fan was scolding at the top of her voice, and my Viola in white satin was stamping and storming and swearing and spitting like fifty cats."

Eyken drew a long breath at the recollection. The figure stood motionless, always with that clutch of proprietorship on his shoulder.

"Oh! I can't tell you the rest exactly. They had been rehearsing the get-up for to-morrow when the scrimmage began. I wasn't wanted; but the maid and dressmaker seemed glad enough to get away, and Fan was following, but as she left the room she turned to her sister with some aggravating words. Vi sprang on her at a bound, gnashing her teeth, shaking her like a rat, and calling her—— well, I——"

"Eyken! Can this be true?"

"It is true as fate. Fanny vanished. Viola turned on me then—but I can't go on with the scene. I gave her Georgie's present and note to quiet her: she tore the note up and danced on it, calling me odious names. She banged the album against the table till it was in bits; she called poor Georgie —— but there: she was as a madwoman, Breye. I wasn't going to stand it, and said so, and then she broke out again, worse than before, and in the middle of it all, the door opened and there they were—all my people and old Bolsover and his wife, and the two bridesmaids. So I said politely but firmly that after what had passed, I considered everything was at an end between us. Then she broke down and cried, and begged pardon, and blamed Fan, till I told her before them all it was no use; that I had been so utterly taken in by her that I never wished to set eyes on her again, *never*. She screamed and cried, and defied me to give her up, swearing she'd follow me up and down the world for ever; that she'd make my life a burden to me. I told her to do her worst, and left. She did her worst, Breye. She followed me about, sent everlasting notes, set her lawyers on me, worried my family; but I kept her off. Now and then she let me alone, when some other

fellow came in her way. She tried it on one man after another—always falling back on me as each one failed. I saw the marriages of all the other girls in the papers and then her death. No, don't you go pitying her for a broken heart! It was measles, or something driven internally by temper, and a blessed release for her family. Not for *me*. No such luck! She made the very fact of being dead and buried an opening for her mean spite, and here she was the very day after, just as you see her to-night."

"Eyken!"

"As I was dressing for a ball our regiment was giving, I saw her in the glass behind me just as the clock struck eleven—as it had done, I remembered, that night at old Bolsover's when I thought I had got rid of her for ever. I persuaded myself it was humbug, and went off lightly—and a precious evening I had. I couldn't *see* her—but I did not know that others might not—and I felt her about me through it all."

I had nothing to answer. How could I confute the story with that vision staring at me? Eyken went on:

"From that night she came. I tried to believe it a delusion. I've been doctored for liver and for nerves and for brain. I've tried change of air and spiritualism and chloral; every blessed stuff you can mention but drink, and it may come to *that* some day. Here she is, and here she means to stay, and I'm a haunted man!"

He dropped his head on the table with a groan. I felt honestly touched by his pitiful plight.

"It's pure spite—nothing else," said he, with a lame attempt at joking. "It's the dying an old maid she can't forgive. That's why she is perpetually calling attention to her left hand. I don't know whether spinster ghosts have a bad time of it or not. I suppose they have—so many seem to walk."

"It's an infernal shame!" passionately broke out Eyken again, after a pause. "Look at me! here I am with everything a man can want, two-and-thirty, as strong as a horse, never had a day's illness in my life, plenty of money, not a bad-looking fellow either, I suppose"—— with a woeful simper. "I like the regiment, I like the work, I like the uniform; I could be so amazingly jolly if it were not for this shameless, audacious hussy of a ghost—ghost of a hussy—which *is* it?—spoiling my whole life, out of sheer malice and cantankerousness."

"Well, I feel for you, Eyken."

"I know you do, old fellow, and I know you won't go and make a public jest of my misery as any other fellow would. You'll keep my secret, won't you?"

I readily promised, and, not seeing my way to anything further, shook hands with him and withdrew. I left him filling a short black pipe and preparing to read until one o'clock should strike. The spectral figure stood there, calm and motionless, gazing on him with her malicious blue eyes. I hope she found it lively!

VISION THE SECOND.—HIS.

THE first week in January saw Eyken and myself speeding northwards on a visit to my old bachelor uncle, Colonel Ralph Breyebrook, of Breyebrook Hold. I don't know why I was anxious for Eyken to see that out-of-the-world, ghost-ridden old dungeon; unless I had some vague ideas about the homœpathic treatment of disease, and thought he might find the atmosphere congenial and soothing.

I glanced in the train over my uncle's note of invitation. One paragraph ran thus: "I shall be glad to see you and your friend. I begin to feel the days very long and very lonely now. I should like to go away for a short time. This place begins to oppress me, but I cannot leave it unoccupied, and I have the usual difficulty in finding a tenant. The modern buildings are too small for the requirements of any but a bachelor's household, and the East wing which might be made available is, for *reasons you know of*, uninhabitable by any but those of the family who are seasoned to it."

Breyebrook Hold came in sight as dusk closed in. A massive, half-ruined tower on the edge of a cliff, partly built into the solid rock, and surrounded by an irregular mass of buildings and remains of fortifications. We were received with a certain amount of state and ceremony by my uncle.

"Glad to see you here, my boy," he said to me over his port wine after dinner, "in your proper place. Malise will be my successor here," he continued, turning to Eyken. "Breyebrook in Lincolnshire of course goes to his elder brother: Malise is *my* heir. It is a comfort to me to think that when I am in my grave the old Tower will belong to one of the old stock; instead of going to the hammer and being bought up by some dashed, up-start cotton-spinner."

"I don't fancy that cotton-spinner would find it festive, uncle."

"Right, Malise, right. There are those about this place who—— never mind," he broke off and nodded ominously. "He'd have to blow the place up with dynamite and rebuild, if he meant to stay here; that's one satisfaction."

The Colonel seemed to approve of Eyken, and he made no comment on early hours when he bade us good-night just before eleven.

"I had to put him in the big tapestry room," observed my uncle, as he departed. "You don't mind the end room in the East wing, do you, Malise?"

"Not a bit. It's the most comfortable room in the house," I added, cheerfully.

"I couldn't put a stranger there, you know. I would go there myself, only Perryman wouldn't stand it after dark; and I can't part with him. I should never get such another valet."

"I suppose it's the old story, uncle?"

He nodded. "I'll tell you what happened last week, Malise. The Delaprymies rode over from Axelby to dine, bringing some friends

who wanted to see the place. Pretty Miss Hester is all very well, but the friends were a fast, noisy set of young people in the execrable style of the present day; they commenced to joke—in detestably bad taste, I consider—about ghosts and the haunted wing, and that conceited young puppy from Cambridge, Phil Delaprymie, must needs talk of making up a party to meet Sir Joscelyn. Well, pretty Hester coaxed me out of my better judgment and—I let them go. But only one at a time. Master Phil, he went first. I can tell you, Malise, his face was as white as his ugly spotty little necktie when he came down, and he had to ask for a glass of brandy in Grindley's pantry before he would face us. Hester ran off gaily next, and she returned all in a tremble. She got to the end of the east corridor, she said, pluckily enough, but came back at full speed with *somebody in boots* striding after her! She did not dare look round. (Sir Joscelyn wasn't likely to let a pretty girl pass—the old ruffian!) The rest of the party seemed quite satisfied without trying farther."

"Seems to me that Sir Joscelyn is becoming a nuisance," I observed, digesting this. "He used to be satisfied with a room or two; but if he now takes to inhabiting the whole corridor, and effecting a practical blockade of everything opening out of it, isn't it—not to put too fine a point upon it—rather inconsiderate towards the rest of his descendants? If you or I were to do such a thing, uncle, people wouldn't like it, you know?"

Colonel Breyebrook frowned. "There's a tone amongst you young men of the present day that I don't understand, Malise; a way of discussing matters, that lie beyond our comprehension, in a familiar, mocking spirit—matters, by Jove, that should be sacred to a man of proper family feeling—that will end, mark my words, in infidelity, Darwinism, materialism, and the deuce knows what! Let me have no more of it."

Next day was wet. After a visit to the stables and a game or two of billiards, Eyken gratified the Colonel hugely by suggesting a thorough afternoon's sight-seeing over the place; as much of it as was weather-proof, that is. So, luncheon over, the big bunch of keys was produced, and with the old butler in advance to unlock doors and open shutters, we wandered idly along, listening to my uncle's never-failing flow of anecdote and description. Upstairs and down he led us, through lengths of dim corridors, up twists of winding staircase, into dusky state chambers with once-gorgeous hangings flapping mournfully in the gloom; through secret doors into concealed passages smelling of mould and mice, and ending in sliding panels.

Every hole and corner had its appropriate legend. Eyken listened with an air of respectful awe that pleased the old man. We arrived at last at the East wing and the picture gallery. This was a long strip of a room on the first floor, hardly wider than a passage, running the whole length of the building. Several bed-rooms, one of them mine, opened out of it on one side; on the other side was a huge old fire-

place with two vast windows. A third window was at one end and at the other the door to the staircase. The walls were sparsely decorated with dingy dead-and-gone Breyebrooks; most of our ancestors having been removed to the Lincolnshire manor house. My uncle paused before "Sir Joscelyn Breyebrook, 1659, temp. Car. II." Sir Joscelyn's booted foot was in the stirrup of a foaming, prancing charger; his plumed hat was in his hand, his golden-brown lovelocks fell over his broad shoulders, but his too fascinating face, whose fatal beauty was still the subject of popular legend, was only represented by two cross-way gashes in the canvas, roughly stitched up.

"That, gentlemen, tells a tale of a wronged woman's anger," said my uncle, "but I'm not quite sure which. That is his first wife, Lady Amabel, daughter of the Duke of Burlington."

Lady Amabel hung on his right, a somewhat shrewdish young creature in pearls and a lace ruff. "On the left Cicely, daughter of John Hobden, farmer." Cicely, Lady Breyebrook, was plump and rosy in classic garb, embracing a woolly lamb that only required a green board and wheels to be very like the real thing.

"Facing him over the fireplace you see the other wives," continued the Colonel. "Dame Dorothy Dobbs, relict of Simon Dobbs, Knight, and vintner of the City of London; Mistress Ursula Borlase, a young orphan heiress whom he abducted from a French convent; and Mistress Banby MacTaggart, daughter of the MacTaggart, of ah-hum Scotland."

The city lady was gorgeous with jewellery, lappeted and furbelowed, with a little spaniel curled up in her ample lap; Mistress Ursula was blue-eyed and baby-faced; and the daughter of MacTaggart was stern and sour, with sandy locks stowed severely away under a close coif, uncompromising elbows and a sad-coloured gown.

"This one looks as if she out-lived him," hazarded Eyken.

"They all did," was my uncle's somewhat startling reply.

"What? Were they all his wives at *once?*"

"All that we know of," placidly answered he. "It's a curious bit of family history. As Sir Joscelyn said himself, he was a man of large heart and comprehensive sympathies, too extensive to be absorbed by one object. He fell a victim to the unscriptural limitations of our English marriage laws. Had he been allowed to possess them all in peace, he might have lived happy and died respected; as it is——Well, here's the story: Lady Amabel, undeniably his first wife and the mother of his heir, hearing some hint of his dispersed attentions, secluded herself wrathfully in Breyebrook Manor, forbidding him to show his face there. He bowed meekly to her decision and came northwards to the Hold, and here he installed his Cicely. They lived happily till the arrival of Lady Amabel, when Sir Joscelyn, after being soundly cudgelled by John Hobden, left the ladies to adjust their claims and appeared at Court, one of the gayest and gallantest figures of the brilliant assemblage there. There, after many adventures, he

was wooed and wedded by buxom Dame Dorothy. He made her the best of husbands, as she frequently testified, finding no fault even with his long absences; from one of which he returned from France with pretty little Ursula. He had reason to believe that Lady Amabel was nursing her resentment in Lincolnshire, and Cicely at home with her father, so he decided on bringing his bride at once to the Hold without pausing in London to enter into any explanations with his Dorothy. Little he guessed what had befallen in his absence. How Mistress Banby had appeared from Scotland with a claim founded on a marriage contracted during his Scotch campaign; how she had hunted him down, travelling from one wife to another with her story, till on that bleak winter evening when the gay groom and bride arrived at Breyebrook Hold, they found themselves received by the four insulted spouses! You can picture the scene."

"No: I can't say that I do exactly," said Eyken, after trying conscientiously for a moment.

"That is a pity; I can't tell much about it," said the Colonel. "No one was present except Sir Joscelyn himself and the five Ladies Breyebrook, and they kept the secret to their dying day. One inquisitive little page related that he ushered Sir Joscelyn and his bride into this very room where the four injured women awaited the traitor; that Sir Joscelyn, smilingly reassuring his terrified little bride, bowed with his usual courtly grace and advanced as if to present her to his four unwelcome guests, who stood sternly confronting him. The door swung to, and no man living *ever beheld Sir Joscelyn again.*"

"But—but—what did they do to him?" Eyken demanded in sore bewilderment. "Was the corpse never found?"

"The five Ladies Breyebrooke left the Hold the following day," continued the Colonel, unheeding, "all attired in widow's weeds. It was observed that each to the end spoke regretfully and affectionately of 'poor dear Sir Joscelyn.'"

Here came a peal from the first dinner-bell. Eyken lingered behind as he left the gallery. "I say," he called out as I was turning into my room, "it's an uncommonly queer story: what do you make of it?"

"Can't say, unless he managed to square them all and escape from the country: probably with wife number six. Any way, he came back in time to haunt the Hold."

"What! you think he got clear of the whole five?" and Eyken gazed admiringly at the poor damaged figure. "What a clever old Turk you were, Sir Joscelyn! How I wish you had lived some generations later to have met my Viola! *You'd* have tackled her!"

VISION THE THIRD.—BOTH OF THEM.

A WEEK of rain; heavy steady, and persistent; falling from a low grey sky that seemed to darken into the long January nights earlier and earlier each evening; varied only by the thick white mists that

swept over the moorland around us or rolled up from the valley below, giving to the shortest expedition more than a spice o peril.

Fortunately, Eyken was the most easily amused of men. He seemed content whether he were playing billiards, turning over the old rubbish in the armoury, or listening to his host's never-endin chronicles as if he liked them: and I believe he did.

"Yes. I like this place," he said one afternoon, as he sat on the frayed tapestry cushions in the deep window of the picture-gallery cleaning a gun, "and I like your uncle. I've got him to tell me Sir Joscelyn all over again to-day. It's the sort of subject that has an interest for me, a personal interest," and he heaved a big sigh.

I had never again referred to his nightly visitor, but he still disappeared at the same hour every evening, only it seemed to me with growing impatience and reluctance. He would stay till the last possible moment and then stride upstairs three at a time, disappearing with a bang of his chamber door and an impious ejaculation."

"Then she *is* here?" I inquired.

"Never fear," he growled: "only luckily I don't seem to mind her so much. I get all those jolly old stories into my head and go to bed quite chirpy. When I hear about respectable family ghosts—like yours, you know—who have got some decent excuse for prowling, I could laugh at that hussy's cheek in setting herself up to haunt *me*. Breye, I want you to tell me about Sir Joscelyn. This is his beat, isn't it? Don't you ever see him?"

I shook my head. "I've heard him about in the small hours, looking out of the windows in the moonlight, and knocking at doors, with a hollow groan; but he never comes to mine. If I were a young and attractive female it might be different. I shouldn't wonder if that is what he is in search of, now I think of it. I believe all his five wives were said to have re-married, so after all he may be wandering forlorn and partnerless in the spirit world."

Eyken worked away with his grimy rags in silence for a short time, while I paced the long, low oak-panelled gallery down to the end oriel, through which, veiled by tangled wreaths of ivy, the light filtered green and indistinct.

He paused in his polishing as I returned. "I wonder what sort of a fellow he was to look at, before he was cut to bits," he said, looking across at the picture. "Do you know, Breye, I have the most unaccountable feeling about him—very much that which I had the first time I saw you."

I looked at Eyken with concern. Perhaps I had made a hazardous experiment in bringing him here at all? Suppose his mind gave way under the perpetual contemplation of ghosts—ancient and modern? The first gleam of sunshine that we had seen since Christmas, came opportunely blinking in through the dusty panes: and we spent the afternoon in the fresh bracing moorland air.

I retired to rest that night provided with a newspaper, the *Fortnightly*, a carriage rug, some spare candles, and an idea. My room had been as gruesomely impressive as the rest of the wing, but some cheerful Philistine had whitewashed the oak panels and put up chintz hangings, displaying blue monkeys sporting amongst groves of pink sunflowers. It looked warm and welcoming by the light of the blazing fire, and it was with an ill-grace that I dragged out a small table into the gallery, made as comfortable a couch as I could on the window seat, and shut myself out in the cold to await events. I had been on so many ghost-quests in my time that I knew the whole programme by heart. Midnight clanged out from somewhere, and found me reading an article on the future of the British Constitution by an uncommonly bad light, just as a heavy footfall was heard ascending the staircase. Tramp, tramp, it came, and by the blue light I beheld a gay and gallant figure approaching. It was clad in the graceful dress of the Stuart period, with heavy riding-boots and spurs. One hand played gracefully with the long lovelocks that fell over his broad shoulders, the other was thrust into his open doublet. He, Sir Joscelyn, strode jauntily along, looking from side to side in quest of something—then knocked at the door of my room and listened; then at the next and the next. Receiving no reply, his brow darkened and he turned with a touching air of appeal to the five portraits, and then appeared to notice my presence. With one stride he came on, his hand clapped on the sword hilt. "A good-looking fellow," I thought, "very like me, plus a red nose and generally knocked-about appearance." The fierce eyes glared steadily at me, and he paused as if expecting some word or sign from me; and as I gazed silently back at him, the candles burned lower and lower, and with a sudden flicker died out.

When I relighted them, I was alone. I looked at my watch. Five minutes past twelve. I had my own reasons for wishing Eyken to see what there might be to be seen of my redoubtable ancestor; but would not summon him unnecessarily. Should Sir Joscelyn appear a second time I knew, according to all ghostly precedent, he would pay a third visit, and then would be time enough.

Again came the tramp of booted feet. Sir Joscelyn entered forlorn and dishevelled. He strode agitatedly backwards and forwards, wringing his hands and appealing with gestures of despair to the portraits of his lost loves. Again he espied me, and turned with the spring of a jealous tiger. Darkness followed, and silence. I lighted up again, and made my way through the dark, shut-up house to Eyken's room.

Eyken had never been to bed. He was sitting sulkily brooding over the fire, and behind him, distinct yet impalpable, stood the white shadow with the clutch of proprietorship on his shoulder.

"Anything wrong?" he asked indifferently.

"No, but I want you. Something odd is going on over there: I

think it will be worth your while to come." He rose, looking mildly surprised, but acquiescent, then hesitated.

"Won't *she* be de trop?" with a savage jerk of his thumb backwards.

"Not at all. Quite the contrary. Come along!" and I hurried him off without further explanation. My candles were burning forlornly in the dark emptiness of the gallery. At the far end, the moon was striving to light the oriel with eerie, furtive glimmerings; Sir Joscelyn's portrait loomed grimly from the black length of wall.

"Dare you wait here alone, Eyken?" I asked impressively.

"I suppose I dare as well as another man, but I don't see why I should," said Eyken, looking puzzled.

"I'll tell you why afterwards. I'll stay with you if you like, but I had better not."

"All right," replied he, producing and beginning to fill a short pipe with his usual placid deliberation. "I suppose I may smoke?"

"Certainly, and I'll bring you some more candles."

I did so, and he settled himself composedly on the long window seat. "No jokes, I hope," he observed, as he tucked the rug over his out-stretched legs.

"None." I closed my door on a queer tableau. Eyken's broad figure, attired in an ancient and beloved velvet coat, with suggestions of evening-dress about his tie and boots, was in the full light of the cluster of candles on the table, and had for background the diamond-latticed panes that caught odd glints of brightness on their murky blackness. A light cloud hovered peacefully over him, and his eyes were meditatively fixed on the opposite portrait, of which the charger, the cravat, and the stitches were the only points distinguishable. The phantom stood at his head, illuminated by some clear, unearthly lustre emanating from itself by which I could see the pale eyes that seemed to sparkle defiance at me across the dusky space, the shimmer of her satin train and the glitter of something on her wrist when she mockingly caressed Eyken's dark head, causing him to start and shudder and brush away nothing vigorously. I do not now deny that my heart beat faster than usual, and a host of direful apprehensions came thronging for the first time into my mind, as I sat listening. I *had* heard of men's nerves giving way under an imaginary scare, but I had never credited Eyken with nerves or imagination. Suppose the ghostly tenant of the gallery had the power to do mischief to an intruder? Suppose he never appeared at all? What a fool I should look when Eyken told the story!

All in a minute—a hoarse, strangled shout; a crash; a heavy fall, and—silence.

I tore the door open, and, lamp in hand, rushed out into the gallery. All was dark, and an overturned candlestick rolled to my feet. A black mass lay on the floor, prostrate. To my intense relief it stirred as I approached—it plunged, it kicked, it sat up and swore vigorously, and I made it out to be Eyken, involved in the railway-rug and the

legs of the overturned table. I disentangled him and helped him up.

"Where is he?" was his first query, "and *what* is he? I declare to you, Breye, I saw him as plainly as I see you now! I thought it was you, up to some game, and I spoke civilly before I shied the candlestick."

Eyken looked wildly up and down.

"There's the candlestick, you see, Breye. It went clean through him. And when I felt his cold fingers on my throat I sang out—any man would, you know. Confound it! my pipe's smashed."

The fellow was all of a tremble. "Have some brandy, Eyken; I've got it here."

"No. Wait a moment." He stretched himself up and drew a long breath. "I want to be quite sure I'm sober." He looked all round, rubbed his eyes once or twice, and then seized me excitedly.

"Breye! Look, quick! What has happened? *Where is she?*"

"*Gone*," I replied, briefly. Our eyes met, and the same thought flashed from one to the other.

"Gone off with Sir Joscelyn! I'll be shot if she hasn't!" and Eyken dropped on the window sill and made the old walls ring with shout after shout of inextinguishable laughter.

"Good luck to the happy pair," he cried, hauling off a boot and sending it flying the length of the gallery. Crash through the oriel into the ivy it went, and vanished in a flash of blue light.

The phantom bride was never seen again. Nor yet Sir Joscelyn.

Sir Egbert Eyken, K.C.B., is the most fascinating bachelor-colonel in the service; the pride and glory of the Royal Denbigh. He will never marry—always hints at desolating love-passages in his early career, and now and then says, "No one knows what a woman's constancy can be, except a man who has tried it."

Our second boy, Joscelyn, is his godson and special delight.

Hester has let loose a fashionable high-art upholsterer in the East wing, and there is a dado and Indian matting and Japanese jars all over the place, and the old portraits have been cleaned and restored; all except poor Sir Joscelyn and his five brides, who have been sent off to Lincolnshire, where my sister-in-law, who doesn't consider his story edifying, has banished four to the lumber-room.

My uncle, who lives with us (strongly restrained by Hester from imparting family legends to the children), sighs and shakes his head over our innovations; but finding that Sir Joscelyn has manifested no opposition; in fact, has never been heard of for years (though Malise, our eldest boy, who is of an imaginative turn, declares he once met him showing a lady round the place); concludes that ghosts, like everything else, deteriorate in the levelling atmosphere of the Nineteenth Century, and that perhaps it is better, after all, that they should take leave of the old places.

ACROSS THE WATER.

By Charles W. Wood, Author of "In the Black Forest," &c.



Calais.

CENTURIES have rolled away since Mary of England lost Calais and declared that after death the word would be found graven upon her heart. Centuries have rolled away: and who knows whether the Calais of to-day is very different from the Calais of 1558? Certain it is that it could not then have been more dull, more uninteresting, more deadly-living than it is now, whilst it may have possessed points and objects of interest that exist no longer.

There are a few quaint old bits in Calais, but only one such spot of any extent or importance—the Place: and even this is quaint rather than ancient. It is picturesque, and on a market day it is lively. The houses of various forms and sizes—no two houses alike from one end to the other—remind one of so many of the streets and squares seen on the Continent, and never seen in England. The streets are uninteresting and narrow. You may fire a cannon from one end of the town to the other: the windows perhaps will rattle in their old casements, but the inhabitants will be none the wiser and none the worse. No one afflicted with melancholy must sojourn in Calais: in the language of the learned faculty, it would root the disease upon him. And yet Calais possesses one glorious privilege par excellence, to which, by-and-bye, we will give due honour and record.

We were bound for Calais, but then we were not afflicted with melancholy. Even if suffering from that distressing malady, which escapes the touch of the healer as cunningly as a will-o'-the-wisp (is it after all much more than a phantom vapour?), we were accom-

panied by an antidote in the form of two high-spirited boys. They, in all the excitement of visiting the French shores for the first time, would effectually have banished from a whole army of invalids the weeping image of Il Penseroso.

"The crossing would be splendid."—"They should remain on deck the whole time, examine the boat, look down the funnel, learn the mysteries of the engine-room."—"Would the boat be a screw or a paddle?"—"They would watch the shores of Old England disappear; catch a first glimpse of Calais, and find out why Mary was nearly heartbroken at its loss—what a fine place it must have been to affect her so much!" Sea-sick? That was all very well for girls, but boys knew better than to go in for such things.

Hope told a flattering tale. On reaching Dover, the April skies were unpropitious. It blew, it rained, the boat rocked inside the pier; everyone shivered with cold, and shuddered at the mauvais quart d'heure inevitably in store for them. The two boys that an hour ago would have rounded Cape Horn in a storm, had found their master. In due time the good ship passed in between the piers of Calais, and with sensations of gratitude, we found ourselves at Dessin's.

We had not come to Calais to remain—who would do that?—but to pay a visit to the village of Landry. A few years ago this was only to be done by taking a carriage at Calais for the day. A drive of about three hours landed you at Landry, the carriage would put up (where or how was always a mystery, for there appeared to be neither inn, nor stables, nor other accommodation in this straggling village); and before nightfall it would reapppear upon the scene, fresh, clean, well appointed, the horses evidently rested and well fed, the coachman as evidently having been in clover.

This drive was then quite an undertaking, yet very pleasant withal. The way was bounded on one side by a canal. On the other, were country houses at intervals, enclosed in high walls and great iron gates; the houses rejoicing in large flower gardens and fruit-laden orchards. Most of these are the "Maisons de Campagne" of the well-to-do-classes of Calais and St. Pierre. Hither they retire for the summer months, to ruralise and enjoy life after their kind, and in their own fashion. A light, sparkling, careless fashion, until the infirmities of age rob them of the insouciance of earlier life. And the French—especially the men—get old whilst the English have not yet ceased to be young.

This drive was an experience and a necessity up to within a year or two, whenever a visit to Landry was contemplated. It is so no longer. You may now take train from St. Pierre as far as Guînes, where a one-horse vehicle may be hired that will complete the journey quite rapidly and satisfactorily.

Availing ourselves of this new route, early one fine morning we left Madame Dessin's for the day, and took train at St. Pierre-les-

Calais for Guînes. Our object in going to Landry was to visit an old retainer of the family, who, from long and faithful service had become truly an old friend. Who, years ago, had made at once the happiness and misery of our lives by indulgences on the one hand and tyranny on the other, exercised with a power that was absolute, and extended to her helpmates in the nursery.

A more masterful spirit, a more determined will, never existed, fortunately guided by a fine intelligence; but, on the other hand, a more faithful, self-sacrificing, duty-fulfilling woman never lived. Neither time nor infirmities would have separated her from her beloved masters and charges; but going home once for a holiday to her native village, long after the age for matrimony might have been supposed



GRANDE PLACE, CALAIS.

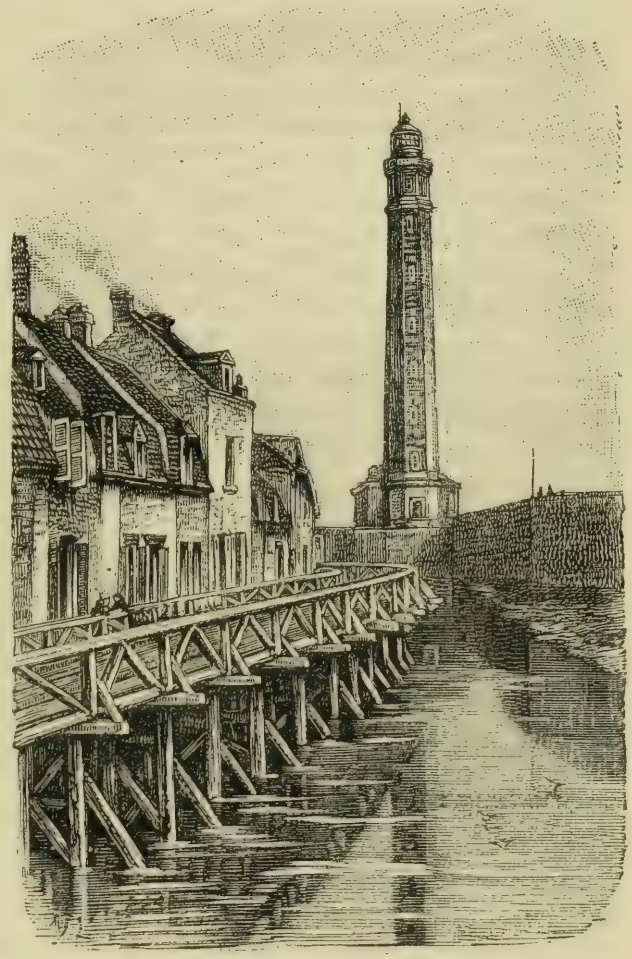
to be passed, she was wooed and married and a', before she had time to realise the consequences of the step. Perhaps repentance came with the awakening—though her few years of married life were happy; but, as is too often the case with us, repentance came too late. Threads once broken are difficult to regather; a vacant place in a household is filled up, and life goes on again. A few years, and then came widowhood.

So Joséphine took up her abode for good and all in her native village, there to live out the remainder of her days. A neat, white-washed cottage was found, and comfortably furnished, a garden well-stocked with flowers and fruit trees—and she was not unhappy.

Periodical visits to England, where she was made much of, formed the oases in the now uneventful desert of her existence. Henceforth her memory dated all things from these great occasions. She would arrive in a dream, and in a dream would remain during her sojourn; unable to realise her happiness, until, once more settled down in

the great chimney corner of her cottage home, she could live over and over again the last month or two of her life across the water.

If one of her children, as she called them, was about to marry, so momentous an event would certainly not be legal without her presence; of that she was persuaded: and it is certainly true that it would not have been completely satisfactory. She would then arrive, magnificent in long gold earrings—of which the French are as proud as an Englishman of a higher rank is of the quarterings upon his shield; rustling in a new gown made specially for the occasion, and afterwards religiously preserved for high days and holidays: worn to the awe and astonishment of her village neighbours, who looked upon her as a being far above themselves. A woman who had travelled; had seen the world and many wonders; had obtained a knowledge of life, a certain refinement of bearing, an experience, a power of learning, which exalted her, in their estimation, to the dignity of a Village Oracle.



CALAIS.

A great event in one of these visits to England was that of going to be photographed. The importance of the ceremony; the difficulty of getting the exact pose; her anxiety lest a fold of the gown should be out of place—all this had to be surmounted by the artist with the courage of a Hero and the patience of a Job. When the result arrived home, her surprise and delight were unbounded. For the first time in her life she beheld her own likeness; saw herself as others saw her: and gave out a string of disjointed sentences, pausing to think and admire between each utterance.

"Oui—c'est moi—c'est parfaitement moi—On ne peut pas dire autrement—merveilleux—tout-à-fait mon bonnet—ma robe—mes

boucles d'oreilles—même jusqu'à la marque sur ma joue!—Mademoiselle Ellen, comment a-t-on fait pour réussir d'une telle manière?—jamais je n'aurais pensée," and so on.

Original she was, faithful and earnest; but like the rest of mankind she had her faults, and one of them was an uncontrollably jealous temper. Die for you, go through fire and water—that she most certainly would have done; but deprive her of her smallest due upon your affections—that she could not forgive. She would listen neither to rhyme nor reason where her heart or her power was concerned. Sole mistress of her realm she would reign, and she ruled her little kingdom with the rod of a despot—though, for the most part, a kindly one. This jealous propensity would sometimes land her in trouble, sometimes give rise to an amusing scene. Let us record one, at hazard.

It was yet early days, and the nursery was full of small feet, and she was in the full glory of her reign. One evening there arrived from England a fresh importation in the shape of a maid. Poor Joséphine, jealous of every new face that entered the house; fearful lest the new tiring-woman, like her predecessor, should come into more frequent contact with her mistress than she herself, had made up her mind to dislike and to put down the intruder—who, to complete the catalogue of her offences, was English and not French.

The morning after her arrival both happened to have sought the kitchen at the same time. It was too much for Joséphine. The maid was smart and trim, wore long gay ribbons in her cap. The occasion was too good to be lost: first impressions went far; her doom must be pronounced. Turning to the assembled members of the lower regions, she waved her hand towards the unconscious maid, and in tragic tones, trembling with ire, exclaimed: "Bête comme un dindon, le portrait d'un singe!" But the maid, to whom French was as Greek, noting the astonished and amused expression of her companions, applied the words as incense, took them for praise, straightway tendered her allegiance to the enemy, and became her most submissive and admiring slave. What female mind can resist the soft allurements of flattery, the delicate persuasions of homage? Not Joséphine, with all her strength of character. In spite of herself she was won over, and a long and peaceful reign ensued.

But to return to Calais, and the present time.

We left Madame Dessin's in the early morning for St. Pierre, took train for Guînes, and in less than an hour had reached the very clean, very French little town. In contrast with dull Calais it looked so cheerful in the bright April sunshine, the air was so sparkling, that we went straight to the Grande Place and the Hôtel du Lion d'Or, and asked Mdlle. Henriette whether, in the event of our coming to Guînes, she could take us in for a few days.

Mdlle. Henriette was equal to the occasion. Her best bed-rooms were at our service. She had no private salon, but could serve our meals very comfortably in a small salle à manger, all to ourselves.

In short, she was able to satisfy our modest requirements. One of the bed-rooms would do duty as a sitting-room for the little time we should spend indoors.

By this time our vehicle was ready. We clattered leisurely through the quiet town. There was no one to interfere with us, hardly a soul to mark our exit. Up through the long street lined with trees, out into the flat country. The whole way from Guînes to Landry is flat and uninteresting—the celebrated and historical Forest lies in the other direction. Our road lay through a succession of fields with neither trees nor hedges to break the monotony of the dead level.

In due time we passed a well-remembered, small, roadside chapel. Votive offerings in the shape of pocket-handkerchiefs and bits of calico were tied to the iron bars, behind which was an image of the Virgin, decorated and surrounded by flowers and tinsel and all manner of glittering trifles. Then the farm of Monsieur Marius, the magnate, rich man, and "grand propriétaire" of the neighbourhood. Now there were hedges on each side budding into leaf. Soon the village green, where the village fair is held—the Ducasse, the great village fête and event of the year: as dear, with its booths and shows and swings and small excitements, to the hearts of the old as it is to the hearts and eyes of the young. Finally, our destination.

The gate was swung wide. In the open porch beyond stood a small group. Joséphine leaning upon her stick: for, alas, the passing years have brought their infirmities, and rheumatism has taken possession of the once active body. Her people surrounded her: a brother, a sister, and a niece, who wait upon her hand and foot, and to whom in return, in every sense of the word, she is as good as gold.

Her agitation was too great for words at the first moment. And when two tall boys (considering their tender age) were placed before her, and pressed to her kindly old bosom, and kissed on both cheeks (to their infinite astonishment and perplexity), she sat down for a moment to recover her senses, and to shed a few tears of regret that these same boys should have grown to that point, and that she should have had no hand in whatever credit might be due to their training.

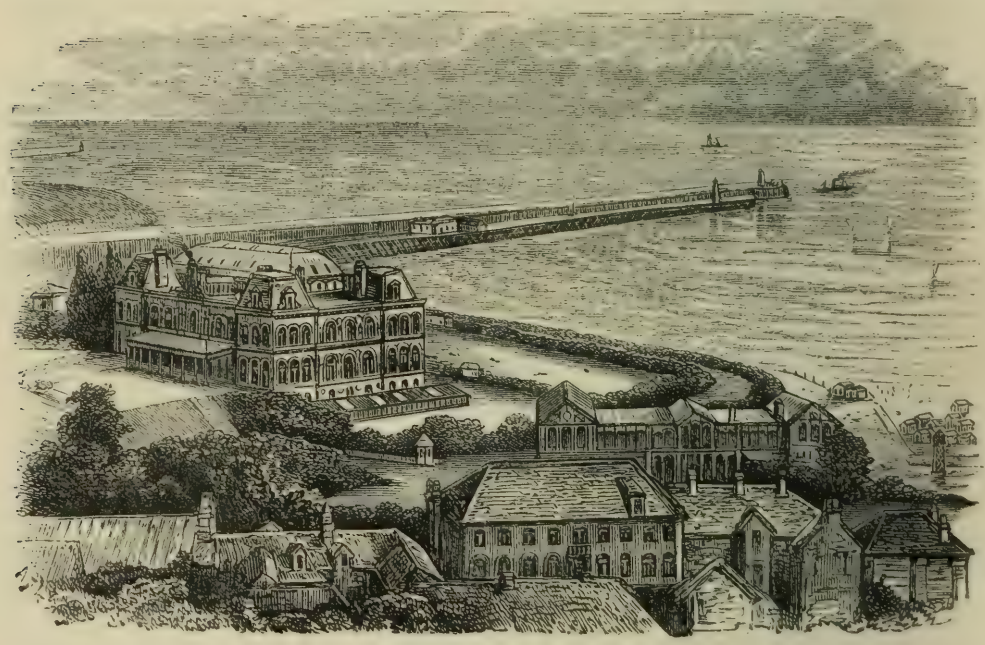
"Ah, my loves," she wailed. "Had I been there, it would have been very different times for you! I have no doubt, now, that your disagreeable French and English nurses have been the tyranny of your blessed childhood and the misery of your young days. With me, on the other hand, at the head of your nursery, you would have been as happy as the angels in heaven! Ask my own children, mes amours—your own cherished father and uncles and aunt—whether I ever crossed them by word or look, or denied them the smallest wish!"

Poor Joséphine! So memory cheats us in our age! She whose word had been as the law of the Medes and Persians!

But the first greeting, the first surprise over, the happiness of the

hour took the place of every other feeling. Joséphine herself was as we ever found her: the pink of perfection and neatness. Not a hair unsmoothed, not a crease in the snow-white cap, not a fold out of place in the gown. The same calm, placid, good face, now pale and subdued with age, yet still young looking; the same kindly blue eyes, from which all the fire of other days had departed; the same dome-like forehead, with plenty of room for thought, and an indication of the will and strength of character that once had brooked no interference from master or from equal.

Her cottage was like herself. We entered upon a quaint, picturesque room, with sanded floor and a ladder staircase leading to the loft. The wooden ceiling was supported by crossbeams, and almost



CASINO, BOULOGNE.

the whole of one side ot the room was given up to the huge chimney. Opposite the door was a wide latticed window, looking on to the garden, the flowers and vegetables and fruit trees: spreading branches that in due season would groan under the weight of pears and apples and rich red plums. Peat, braize and wood sent up a pleasant odour from the hearth and something of a blaze. On one side, within the chimney, was an arm-chair for Louis, the brother, in which, his day's work done, he smokes his pipe, and pats his dog, and meditates; on the other side, a low, small chair for herself. Here, at night, she often sits up when the others have all gone to rest, and thinks and broods over bygone days and her eventful life—eventful as compared with those about her. So thinking, she is wont to fall asleep and wake up when the night is far spent and the fire has long been out; and in darkness she has to grope her way to her room. As Malvina, her

niece, remarks, she may do it once too often one of these days, and wake up either paralysed with cold or burnt to a cinder. But Joséphine has still a will of her own left, and no one can turn her. She is now occasionally subject to deep fits of melancholy, and in those hours her chimney corner is her best friend and comforter.

There is a long table under the window, and when the lid is removed it is a trough in which the bread is made—a fortnight's consumption at a time. If you happen to be there on baking day, Malvina will show her good will towards you by making galettes as well. And these, hot and smoking out of the oven, well soaked in country butter—tell me if ever you ate a greater delicacy?

Just inside the door to the right is the larder, given up to country fare, and seeing from year's end to year's end few delicacies of any sort. The killing of the pig is the great event in the way of stock



On the Port, Boulogne.

provision for the winter. In the shape of meat it is what most of the villagers depend upon; and if the pig turns out badly, it is a sad look out for the Sundays, high days and holidays of the cold months that have to come. Joséphine, as befits a person of her importance, is able to afford herself many little indulgences undreamed of by her neighbours. But simple in tastes and indifferent to the good things of life from youth upwards, she has returned to her earliest impressions, and lives far more frugally than she need.

Her one indulgence and luxury is good tea: this she cannot do without—and it is a more expensive article in France, and a much better article, than it is in England. Down in the Département of the Isère, where the Alps raise their eternal heads, and in spring the nightingale will sing you a perpetual cradle song, you may give sixteen and twenty francs a pound for your tea, without being extravagant. Only, see that you make it yourself, and trust not to the tender mercies of French servants.

The walls of Joséphine's little room are lined with portraits, be-

ginning at an age when we like two birthdays a year, and gradually reaching a period when we begin to think that one in two years is sufficient. These she visits at stated times, just as other people do their picture galleries, and so holds mental receptions with those who have now fallen out of her every-day life, but who dwell in her heart and memory for ever.

Her bed-chamber is a more state apartment, where to-day, in honour of our presence, a banquet is spread, and the snowiest of linen and the best of electro-plate grace the table. A side table groans under its load of good things; village tarts, which, by the way, have few rivals of their kind; biscuits and dried fruits, bonbons, almonds and raisins complete the list. If it were later in the year, the table would be adorned with peaches, plucked by "le cousin" from his own trees as a delicate compliment—and nothing could be more delicately offered—grapes, pears, and green figs. One notices that young eyes are at once cast in that direction, and though too well bred to be kept there more than a moment, that moment has been enough to take stock of all; as may be told by a sparkle, a slight increase of the "hectic flush" that is the sign of perfect health.

When the banquet is over, the boys turn wild. They climb the ladder, and scour the loft, and almost bring down the roof: make acquaintance with the barns, the rabbits, the fowls, the pig—which latter does not take their fancy. They jump ditches full of water with the help of long poles, to the terror of Malvina, who expects to see them land in the very middle, and come out soaked, green, and half drowned. Finally, in high glee, they go off with her to fish with nets in a large pond half a mile away; and they vote for village life as the jolliest on earth. How far this would go, how long it would last, when the first novelty had worn off, is uncertain.

But there is no doubt that it *is* a happy life for high-spirited boys. It is perfectly unrestrained. They may fly over hedges and ditches, scour the country, follow the plough or reap the grain; wherever they go, and whenever, they will be welcome; and in a month or two will lay up a store of health against the time to come, and grow strong and straight as darts.

It may be an impracticable idea, but I have often thought how much better people might do by going to one of these country villages for a time, instead of crowding to some noisy, vulgar, detestable sea-side place, where they might live a primitive life such as they never lived before and never dreamed of. It would be resigning everything in the way of refinement and civilisation, except the refinement we are able to carry about with us, and which, after all, should be all-sufficient; but it would be an experience bringing with it a rich reward in the shape of freshness of mind and feeling, health and perfect rest. And yet, all things considered, I suppose it could not be done. Many ideas look well, seem possible, until put into practice. Then they often fail. Half the mistakes in life occur simply because

people are not able to realise the effect of their ideas and actions, until they have positively borne their bitter fruit.

Whilst the boys were gone ditch jumping and fishing (it was one of the happiest days of their young lives), we gathered round a narrow circle and went over bygone years and events. There were a thousand-and-one questions to be asked and answered; the threads of interrupted histories had to be taken up where they were last laid down. It is not easy for the English to understand the light in which an upper servant is regarded by the French, or by those who are as good as French. The feeling of real intimacy that is established when the lapse of years of tried and faithful service has verged that serving man or woman almost into a member of the family. On the other hand, the devotion that exists, the perfectly good understanding that will never for one moment lapse into undue familiarity; the place and position that is kept through all and never lost sight of. All this, in such a case, makes relations in France between master and servant, a very different matter from one's ordinary, every-day experience.

Landry is the very type and perfection of a French village. It is celebrated for its cleanliness, and its simple inhabitants pride themselves on possessing that one particular virtue above all others. It is well-to-do, in its small, quiet way. Some of the women work in the fields; some earn their living—and a very good one it is for those whose requirements are so modest—by cutting and trimming the tulle that is made at St. Pierre-les-Calais. The men beat out the flax; it is their chief occupation; and at certain times of the year you may hear the swish of the machine from almost every outhouse. If the flax fails—as it does fail sometimes—as it has rather failed this year—then the men are badly off, for there is scarcely any other work they can turn to to keep the wolf from the door.

But here come the boys from fishing, and very soon we must be en route for Guînes, for we have to catch the return train to Calais. Pascal—"le cousin"—is to take us in his voiture; an honour—as he puts it—so earnestly solicited, it would be the height of ill-feeling to refuse him.

Pascal is a great man in his little way. He has a house that is better, larger, and more important than most in the village. His comely wife divides her attention between keeping it in order and looking after her two fine bairns. He has a garden full of choice flowers and fruit trees, and his peaches, when ripe, are ambrosia. He farms his own land, and is his own master; and though he follows the plough himself, and works as hard as any labourer, he might, if he chose, take life more easily than he does. His unusually broad forehead and large, mild-blue eyes betoken thought and intelligence above his class. So, for the few years he went to school, he carried everything before him. "And I don't know how I did it," he will say. "It certainly was not industry, for I was not industrious. Often I would only look at my lessons as I trudged my way to Guînes. And if any

mischief was going on, I was always at the bottom of it.—Yes, perhaps it was a pity I was taken away so soon. I think so now, though I did not think so then. But my mother wanted me at home. I was an only child, and she said she could not do without me. On my part I asked for nothing better than to throw up books and live the free life of the country. Et me voilà!—neither one thing nor the other, like a half-fledged bird whose feathers will never grow."

But he does himself injustice. He is up in all the questions of the day, and converses upon them with sense and judgment and accuracy. He is not at all a bad musician; and once when we were about to pay Joséphine a visit, he, fearing we should have trouble in finding her, sketched out a map of the roads, and turnings, and houses, so clearly and cleverly, that we reached her very door without a moment's difficulty, or doubt, or inquiry.



THE CALAIS-DOUVRES ENTERING CALAIS HARBOUR.

And, now, here he comes with his voiture. It is a marvellous affair, with a great hood to it, and E. wonders how in the world she is to mount and get in, and where the back goes to. "Auntie Nellie," says Harry, after looking at it thoughtfully and doubtfully, "I don't think this would do for Hyde Park, or Piccadilly—or at all for England." We, too, are rather of his opinion, but keep it to ourselves.

Finally, E. and the two boys are safely packed behind, out of sight. At least they are packed; E. confides her fears as to their safety. The voiture has a decided tilt, and she feels as though the back must inevitably come out and deposit them in the road. I find my place by the side of Pascal, and, thus settled, we start for Guînes.

The farewell this evening has been merely an "Au revoir sans adieu," for we have promised to come over on Sunday, if all be well, and we decide to pay Mdlle. Henriette a visit. So we go off triumphantly. The boys think it the greatest fun in the world; and wish the drive would last all night; and are convulsed at the wonderful sounds that

issue from Pascal's lips in his endeavours to urge on the horse. But the animal was working in the fields this morning, and refuses to be hurried. And Pascal is tender-hearted, and will not use the whip.

"Ce n'est pas qu'il est paresseux, voyez vous, Monsieur," he says in apology; "mais il est un peu fatigué. Du reste, nous avons le temps."

Pascal is right, for on arriving at the station we find that, in spite of our slow progress, we have more than half an hour to spare. The getting into the voiture was a wonder, but the getting out is a miracle. No one but a slight, supple figure such as E. could have done it so gracefully and dexterously.

As for Harry and Hastings, they scramble out regardless of dignity or grace, or anything but a sense of perpetual motion and unceasing fun. Before we can turn round they are across the line examining the very sooty-looking engine, in full and sudden intimacy with the driver. They take a great fancy to him. "He is so jolly black," they say. "And then, papa, he is so kind. He asked us if we would like to drive the engine to Calais. Please, may we?"

Needless to give the answer.

Finding we have half an hour to spare, E. and I hastily consult together, and make up our minds that we will give the Lion d'Or a trial. So we go off to Mdlle. Henriette to finally engage the rooms for Saturday afternoon. On our way to the Grande Place we pass Pascal taking in a supply of bread at the baker's. We throw him a nod and an "A Dimanche!" He bows with his grave, earnest, pleasant face—Pascal takes life very much in earnest—and we turn the corner and see him no more. Mdlle. Henriette "est enchantée;" the matter is settled, and we are soon steaming away towards Calais.

Saturday afternoon came and we took leave of Dessin's Hotel without great grief. Madame was everything that was civil and polite, and that the town is dull is no fault of hers. Certainly the Place had that morning been amusing. It was market day, and was crowded with buyers and sellers. Women, picturesquely attired, some in gold chains and long gold earrings glistening in the sun, were asking fabulous prices, and coming down to reason and moderation. You will hear such a dialogue as this going on, in tones loud enough to be heard across the market place.

LADY (*with servant behind her carrying a large tin basket*). "Combien cette couple de poulets?"

SELLER (*wearing gold chain and earrings, a sweet amiable face, an innocent expression, but all the while calculating her customer*). "Ces poulets, Madame? Tenez, c'est tendre comme du beurre." (*Cracking the breast and thereby spoiling the bird.*)

LADY. "Je ne dis pas le contraire. Je vous demande votre prix."

SELLER. "Combien, Madame?—Eh bien—six francs, pour vous."

LADY (*indignantly*). "Allons donc! vous plaisantez! Passez, Alphonsine (*to the servant*). Je n'achète pas."

SELLER (*calling back*). "Attendez, Madame. Nous nous arrangerons. Voulez-vous donner quatre francs? c'est vendre pour un rien."

LADY (*returning*). "Je vous offre deux-francs-cinquante—pas un liard de plus."

SELLER (*indignant in her turn*). "Comment, Madame! Vous voulez donc que je vous les donne! deux-francs-cinquante! C'a ne me paierais pas seulement mes frais! Tenez, vous les aurez pour trois francs, et pas un sou de moins."

LADY. "Mathilde, vous êtes dure comme du bois, et la plus chère du marché. Je vous les donne, vos trois francs, mais e'est pour la dernière fois. Alphonsine, mettez les poulets dans votre cabas."

And on next market day the very same scene and the very same words will take place, between the very same people. And so life goes on with these "petites distractions" in these French towns.

It had been market day at Guînes on the Friday, so that when we reached the Grande Place it was as clean and clear as if market there were a thing unknown. Mdlle. Henriette was ready to receive us, and we found our lines had fallen in pleasant places. It was decidedly a change for the better from Calais. Quiet though the town was, the Grande Place was open and airy, and there was something particularly bright about it; the old-fashioned houses with their white shutters, the white stones with which the Place was paved.

The next morning, Sunday, a small drama took place. Boys will be boys, and these two boys had been many times promised a punishment if they were uproarious in their room in the morning, or turned it upside down, or inside out. A last visit of inspection showed them sleeping in their beds and looking as innocent as angels. The next morning a small game of bolstering was carried on sub-rosâ. Unfortunately, the chambermaid had brought up a huge and quite superfluous cruche of hot water, and placed it upon the table. A pillow on its journey from one bed to the other missed its mark, and hit the jug. Down it went. A crash—a smothered cry—dead silence. Entrance upon the scene of action showed the cruche prone upon the floor in twenty fragments, and a deluge on carpet, chairs, and clothes. The delinquent was ordered back to bed—a punishment more dreaded than cane or grammar—and Marie appeared with an army of towels, sponges, and buckets.

At breakfast in came Mdlle. Henriette, panting, breathless, agitated.

"Is it possible! Can I believe what I see! And you mean to say, Monsieur, that you have the heart to keep that poor little fellow in bed! Oh, he must get up. You must pardon him for my sake. You cannot make boys into reasonable beings—it isn't in them. And what is a broken jug, after all? Pray let him come down."

"It was not the broken jug, Mademoiselle," we answer, "so much as disobedience. He has so often been promised a punishment for this, that it was impossible to cry wolf any longer. He shall get up after breakfast." And Mdlle. Henriette went off there and then with

jam and half-a-dozen delicacies to console the poor, persecuted sufferer: and in the end absolutely refused to charge a single sou for the broken jug or the half-ruined carpet.

When, later, came the important event of dinner, Mdlle. Henriette's proved the best served and the best dressed we had had for many a long day in France. She is quite a cordon bleu—but does not always herself preside at the post of honour in the kitchen. Next, the one-horse car—it really was a sort of covered waggonette—came up, and away we went towards Landry.

Our visit that day was very much a repetition of the last. Joséphine had been worrying and fretting ever since seven in the morning; consulting the clock, gazing at the clouds; twenty times having the hearth replenished unnecessarily: one moment certain that we should come, the next persuaded that something would happen. We should have fever, or be upset on the road, or the train from Calais would have overturned and killed us all. She was more herself to-day; more able to realise that we were about her in the flesh and not in the spirit; more reconciled to the fact that she had had no hand in the bringing up of those two boys, who, this afternoon, decidedly helped to make her bonheur. She had to be watched with Argus eyes, or she would have loaded them with cakes and bonbons and fruit, to the ruin of their digestion for a week to come.

As the shades of evening fell, and with them came the sound of our carriage wheels and the jog-trot of the horse, so fell the shadows of melancholy upon Joséphine's good old face. The coming had been paradise, this last parting was bitter. She was getting old—who knew if she should ever see us again? And indeed it is to be feared that the sands of her life are running short.

So to-night, when the time came, her sadness grew apace. Farewells were quickly over, and the last vision of Joséphine was similar to the first, only now in the middle of the road, instead of in the porch. A venerable figure surrounded by her attentive, affectionate satellites. The road took us out of sight, and then, we knew, the procession would slowly move indoors and Joséphine would go back to her chimney corner, and dream over the happy hours she had lately spent, and indulge in the luxury of melancholy.

The next day we left Mdlle. Henriette's, and the Lion d'Or, quite sorry to do so. She had made us very comfortable; nothing had been a trouble, everything a pleasure to her. And we found her charges so reasonable that I felt compelled to protest against them. Certainly she must have lost by us, and I asked her how she was ever to make a fortune and retire, at this rate. Oh, she replied, she was not in a hurry, and she liked work. By-and-bye she would try to grow avaricious and expensive. She may try—she will never succeed: it is not in her. One week with her would scarcely have cost more than one day at Dessin's. And at Mdlle. Henriette's we were really more comfortable and more lively than at Calais. The houses

did not press down upon us with so heavy a weight. True, there were a few drawbacks, such as one generally meets with in a French town, but, after all, it is not possible to have everything quite perfect, go where you will.

Our destination on leaving her was Boulogne. At the Hôtel des Bains we found ourselves again in very different quarters and in the enjoyment of a very different scene. From the windows of our own private rooms—where, apart from any noise and bustle there might be in the hotel, we were as comfortable and retired as we could have been at home—the view was as gay and lively as at Dessin's it had been dull and depressing.

The port was before us with its multitude of vessels of all sizes and nations. Fishermen and fisherwomen—the latter picturesque in



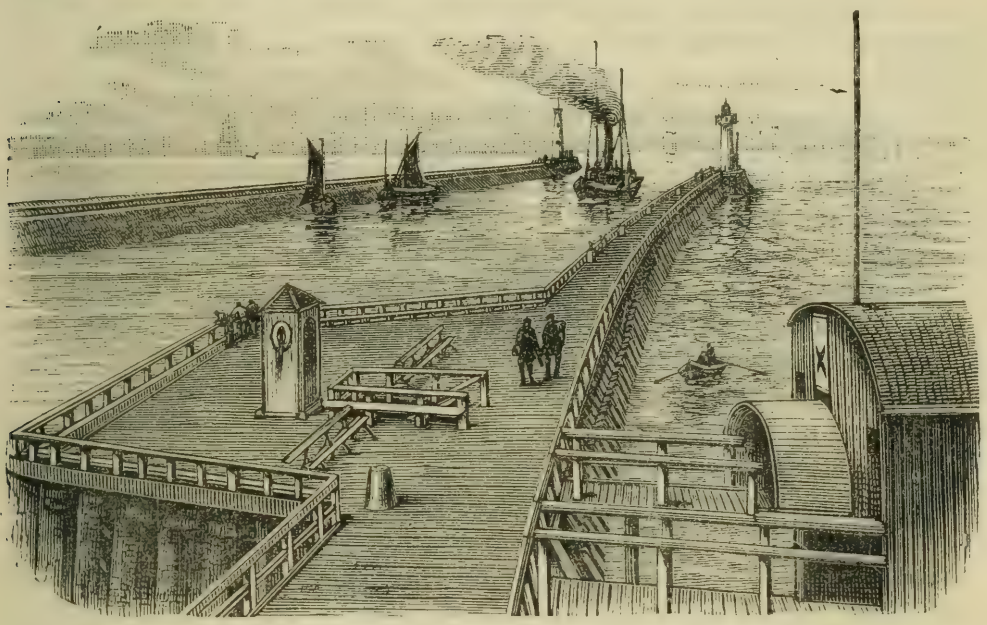
UPPER TOWN, BOULOGNE.

flying white caps with broad frills and short red petticoats, and bare, shapely legs and feet—were constantly passing and repassing up and down and over the bridge, leading to the other side and the railway station. It was a scene brimming over with life and gaiety. In the early morning, and again at midday, the factory girls in their short brown petticoats—as noisy, but not as picturesque as the fisher-girls—would pass the hotel in scores, the clang of their wooden sabots falling like sharp hailstones or castanets upon the pavement. The opposite hills formed a background to the harbour and the station; and here a church spire cut the sky, and there a windmill or a "calvaire" stood out on the summit of the heights.

At the spring season of the year, nothing can be pleasanter than Boulogne. It is not then overcrowded with English, and the excursion boats from Ramsgate and Margate have not commenced to let

loose upon the place a daily flood of that most wonderful of all created beings, the Englishman out for a day's holiday; who, as a friend in Boulogne observed, lands in the loudest of spirits, and returns with a bottle under one arm and a yard of bread under the other.

Though only two hours' distance from our shores, the change to Boulogne is as radical as if it were two hundred hours away. In this early part of the year you have it pretty well to yourself; and can come and go as you like; and from the end of the piers watch the shrimpers dragging their nets, in comparative solitude. The tidal boat from Folkestone brings its daily freight, and if you have no more exciting distraction on hand, you may go and watch the poor objects land and crawl over to the buffet and the train, and sink into corners, as if for them the world and its frivolities were over.



BOULOGNE.

The casino, it is true, is deserted; the band has not yet commenced its enlivening concerts. The gardens of the Tintilleries have not begun to light up their magic lamps, and hold their revels and let off their fireworks; but the absence of these distractions only proves that the town is free from the presence of the annoying element. And then the air is so light and bracing, so bright and sparkling; there is nothing like it in England. Nothing like it anywhere—except in Calais; and the air of Calais is yet finer. This is the great privilege possessed by Calais, referred to early in this paper. Only feel the air from the end of the pier blowing upon your face, and the most exhausted nerves, the most shattered constitution will at once revive, be invigorated, restored.

Whilst in Boulogne we went up to the Couvent de la Visitation to pay a visit to a cousin of ours, or rather of our mother's, who is one of

the nuns of this strict religious order—that branch of the Osborne family being Roman Catholic. Years ago, a generation before we had come into existence, she was a young and accomplished woman, delighting her friends by her wonderful singing and harp-playing, known as Miss Osborne: now she is known only as Sœur Marie-Ursule.

Arrived at the convent, we passed through the great gates into a species of court-yard laid out with blooming pansies, and kept with the greatest care. To the left was the public entrance into the convent chapel, into which the world may penetrate and listen to the refined singing of the nuns, concealed behind a dark screen at the side of the altar. Turning to the right into an inner court-yard or quadrangle, we rang a bell that clanged through the corridors with that startling, almost solemn sound bells always have in these silent, hushed establishments. A Sister, pale, meek, gentle, answered the summons. In reply to our question as to whether we might be permitted to see Sœur Marie-Ursule, we were ushered upstairs into a "parloir" hung round with religious subjects. At the further end of the room was an iron grating, and, behind it, closely-barred shutters.

We waited about a quarter of an hour, a dead silence reigning in the vast establishment. Then the sound of a distant door closing, then the closing of a door near at hand; then quiet footsteps behind the grating; and then the shutters were unbarred and swung back, and Sœur Marie-Ursule stood before us. She was accompanied by a nun, who remained present throughout the interview. During the whole time their hands held work, for they are never permitted to be one moment unoccupied.

The face of Sœur Marie-Ursule was pale, calm and placid, as only the faces of those can be who have lived a long life of seclusion from the world, its cares, anxieties, disappointments, its gradual awakening to realities.

"Is it not strange for you to receive visits from the outside world?" we asked her. "You who have been so long time dead to that world."

"A long time, indeed," she replied, in a soft, modulated voice, and still in perfect English, which she said she felt as if she had forgotten. "It is thirty-seven years since I was outside these convent walls. Nevertheless, it is a great pleasure to see you. We are not quite dead to what is going on in the world, though we no longer have part in it."

"And does not time pass slowly and wearily?" I asked. "Do you not grow tired of this life, the same, day after day and year after year?"

"Not at all," she said. "We have our fixed hours for work and prayer: every hour its appointed duty. We are quite happy, quite contented. I am growing old now, and I find nothing to regret in the life I have chosen."

It was a strange confession from one who in the years gone by had

been unusually accomplished, possessed many brilliant qualities, might have adorned society.

"I very much wanted to bring you some flowers," said E.; "but I was not sure that you would be allowed to receive them."

"Oh, yes," she replied. "It is the beginning of our Mois de Marie, and next Sunday our altar will be decorated with all the flowers we can gather together. I should be delighted if you would send me some."

When the interview had lasted about a quarter of an hour, Sœur Marie-Ursule rose from her seat.

"I think I may not remain longer," she said, "though I am sorry to wish you good-bye. Above all, when you return to England, give my love to my dear cousin, your mother."

"May I shake hands with you?" I had the temerity to ask.

"Oh no, no!" she cried, shrinking back. "Hardly would that be permitted with my own father, were he living. But I may shake hands with *you*," she said, turning to E. "I have your permission?" she added, appealing to the Sister, whose eyes until now had been steadfastly bent upon her work.

For a moment she raised them, looked at us each in turn, and gravely bowed her head in assent. Then, as well as the double grating permitted, Sœur Marie-Ursule and E. shook hands. And then the great shutters were swung-to again and fastened. We heard the Sisters leave the room; receding footsteps; and once more dead silence: the silence of a living tomb.

It was impossible to leave without a certain feeling of sadness and melancholy. Thirty-seven years without once quitting the shelter of those gloomy walls! And when the last hour has struck, and the hands are meekly folded, a grave within the walls will receive the body from which the spirit has fled to brighter regions.

Before the following Sunday we visited a conservatory, and chose two of the best and purest azaleas it contained. These were sent up to the convent addressed to Sœur Marie-Ursule. In due time there reached England a little note of acknowledgment, which read with unusual interest, penned, as it had been, by one who for nearly forty years had been dead to the world.

We had spent a pleasant fortnight in Boulogne, in quietness and comfort at the Hôtel des Bains, and time was now up. The boys had to return home to their Latin and Greek. On Monday, the first of May, we crossed over to Folkestone. Our French life, almost more familiar to us than English, fell away. Once more on England's shores we found ourselves in a very different element. Life is heavier, more dull and prosy, more matter-of-fact, less gay, witty and sparkling. In return, perhaps it is more purpose-fulfilling, and more earnest.

THE ROMANCE OF THE IRON ROOM.

VOWS made in summer sometimes become difficult to keep under the chilling influences of fogs, frosts, and snow. It was such pleasant, easy-going love-making, while the tubs at the boathouse bloomed with geraniums and calceolarias, and the water ambled gently by. Now, a turn in a punt, or a brisk scull to some sheltered spot where tall rushes and fair water-lilies made an enchanted palace; she in delicate frocks of "zephyr," pink or blue, he in flannels, his handsome face glowing with exercise and bliss. Yes, this was all easy and delightful, if it could only have lasted!

Directly the large country house began to lose its guests, the hostess, Mrs. Hope, had time to look about her, and one of the first inconvenient things she saw, was the very evident love affair between handsome Jack Talbot of the —th, who had nothing in the world but his captain's pay, and her only daughter Lilian, whose first duty to her parents lay in making an eligible match! This would never do. But the worldly-wise lady reflected that Captain Talbot's visit was only to last three days longer, and with true art appeared blissfully content with the position. The night before he went away the suitor applied to Mr. Hope, and begged to have his prayer favourably answered; and he (having received his brief from his wife) temporised gently; spoke of youth, changeable affections, and so on, and said he could not at present give a definite answer.

"May I hope?" asked the suitor.

"If you like," said the father; and nothing could have ended better. Lilian waved a damp pocket-handkerchief from her window, and the knight "rode away."

A month later Jack was ordered to Egypt, and Mrs. Hope thought it highly probable that all her difficulties would be removed by the Egyptians. If not, time was gained at any rate, and Lilian was growing handsomer every day.

"My dear," said Mr. Hope one evening, "Lord Blackmoor is evidently struck with Lilian."

"So I see," responded the wife, smiling complacently.

"I shouldn't be surprised if he spoke shortly."

"So much the better."

"But, ah—how about the other fellow?" queried Mr. Hope, uneasily.

"Nothing about him," said Mrs. Hope, resolutely; "he must not be mentioned."

"Lord Blackmoor is very old."

"He will make the better husband."

"Lilian is a beautiful, warm-hearted girl!" faltered the father.

"Had she not been beautiful a coronet would not be offered her."

"But, Harriet—you and I were both young when we married."

Mrs. Hope calmly fixed her fine eyes on the ceiling, and her husband saw sentiment would find no response.

And so, while Jack was bronzing his handsome face, and fighting for his country in Egypt, his Lilian was desired to receive the addresses of an elaborate old fop of seventy-five—and she was only eighteen. But these things happen, so we must contemplate them.

It would be useless to describe how the net was woven round the victim, how she was watched and guarded as they travelled throughout their autumn tour. Between her mother and Lord Blackmoor it was arranged that the wedding should take place at Christmas, and in the meantime a rumour came that Captain Talbot was killed.

The Hopes' return home took place the end of November, and the old bridegroom elect was to come there in December. He arrived, and to the girl seemed more distasteful than ever. He followed her about with an affectation of youthful ardour, which sorely warred with gout and dyspepsia.

"Mamma," said the frenzied Lilian, "if you don't keep him away from me *now*, I'll say 'no' at the altar!" And, fearing this was true, Mrs. Hope rejoiced in an attack of gout which confined the old nobleman to his room, where she treated him with flattery and devotion.

So then the poor girl wandered down to the boathouse. It was half a mile from the house, and there was a snugly furnished iron room there, where tea-things and spirit lamps were kept. Lilian had often made tea here in the happy summer; and now she entered the room, which struck cold and damp from long disuse, and throwing herself in a chair, sobbed as if her heart were breaking.

The floods were up, and the river looked like stormy lead. Little islands visible in summer now lay buried under the rushing waters. No flowers, no sunshine—all like her own life, blank, dark despair.

A footstep outside made Lilian start up quickly. It was the postman, on his way to the house.

"Have you any letters for me?" asked the girl.

"Yes, Miss, surely," said the man, and he found three, handed them to her, and passed on.

Lilian re-entered the iron room, sank on the sofa, and with trembling hands tore open one—it was from Jack! As she read it, she found that other letters had been sent to her—who had had them? Jack, who was in London, said he was fast recovering from his wounds, and that he had determined to come down and hear from her own lips that she gave him up. And he concluded by saying he would be at the boathouse by five o'clock the next evening—would she meet him there?

The "next" evening meant this evening; this evening that ever was; for the letter had been written the day before.

Lilian's delight at this unexpected news was paramount. She hastened back to the house, determining that nothing should reveal the change. She inquired civilly after Lord Blackmoor, had five dresses tried on by a dressmaker, drove with her mother to pay some calls; and when they returned home it was a quarter to five o'clock. Mrs. Hope ordered tea for herself in her bed-room, saying she should sit afterwards with Lord Blackmoor till dinner-time; so Lilian was at liberty. She escaped in the dark winter's afternoon, ran swiftly down through the park, and as she neared the boathouse, she saw a tall well-known figure keeping out of the way of observation. Her heart beat so violently that she could scarcely go on, and then the lover threw caution to the winds, and in another few seconds all that was needful was told, and the old, old story went on as smoothly as if no old Lord Blackmoor existed.

Late that night, after Mrs. Hope and the servants had gone to bed, Lilian sought her father in the library.

"My dear girl, what is the matter?" he cried nervously, as the fair form of his daughter, robed in a light blue dressing-gown, suddenly appeared, and sat down on his footstool.

"Papa, Jack isn't dead," whispered Lilian, fixing her lovely eyes on Mr. Hope's wondering countenance, and fondling his hand.

"Isn't he, my dear?" helplessly inquired the old gentleman, who had been aware of the fact for some time.

"I am going to marry Jack, papa——"

"Then don't tell me, my dear; don't tell me!" exclaimed Mr. Hope, a beam of delight on his countenance. "I know nothing about it, mind: if I did, your mother would worm it out of me." For there are still "Caudle Lectures," good reader.

"Then dear, dear papa—you won't be angry—if—to-morrow——"

"*Never*, my love; never as long as I know nothing about it," hastily cried the father, kissing the pretty up-turned face, and adding in a whisper, "Talbot is the soul of honour, and I can trust him."

In the grey morning it was Miss Hope's habit to take a walk. She took one next morning, and a muffled figure emerged from the iron room to meet her. And by the first up train these two reached London, and by the time Lord Blackmoor's gout relented sufficiently to enable him to appear at a late breakfast, where he hoped to meet his fair fiancée, a telegram from Mrs. John Talbot announced to the scandalised mother, the apparently scandalised father, and the mortified nobleman that Lilian would never wear a coronet.

She did not do badly though. An eccentric godmother of Captain Talbot's was so impressed by the fact that a girl had refused a coronet for his sake, that she left him her fortune.

MINNIE DOUGLAS.

QUITE A ROMANCE.

"IT is too aggravating of you, Aunt Letitia. Dear me, I wish *I* never forgot anything!"

"No, no; for mercy's sake, don't say that, child. Do not wish you never forgot: for then you would have to remember all the disagreeable things that happen to you throughout your life. Believe me, Alice, it is better as it is. If we never forgot anything we should have to carry down to our graves the vivid picture of all the grief, or sorrow, or pain we have suffered; of all our *mistakes*, child; worse than all, of the hateful times when we have made simpletons of ourselves, and been laughed at for it by the world."

Miss Alice Kildare laughed at this. She was fond of laughing at elderly people in general, and at her aunt in particular. She did not know Miss Fennet's age, but felt sure she must be five and fifty; and she did know that she was somewhat strict; too much given to keep her niece in order and hold forth to her of her faults.

"Yes, Alice, I am thankful to forget some things, but I do not forget your behaviour to Mr. Creighton last night, though you would wish me to, it seems. It was worse than I have seen it yet. I heard you laughing with Susan Sant yesterday at old maids: let me tell you, child, that you stand a good chance of being an old maid yourself, unless you mend your manners."

"Not *much* chance of that, Aunt Letitia," returned the merry-hearted girl: "considering that I am not twenty years old yet and that I am engaged to be married."

"Before I was twenty years old, Alice, I was engaged to be married; when I was twenty-two, I had been engaged three times; yet here I am, an old maid in spectacles—and I intend to die one, please God. Think now, what heart-breaking recollections I should have to carry about with me if I remembered the pain and vexation that it caused me—and serve me right, too, that it did. As we grow in years, Alice, memory loses sight of what has been disagreeable in the past, retaining only its pleasant records—for Heaven is merciful."

"But if you were engaged three times, Aunt Letitia, how was it you never married once?" demanded Alice, wondering at Miss Fennet's unusual communicativeness.

"Because I spoiled my chances, child. I threw them away—as I foresee you will throw yours."

Alice tossed her head; she rather enjoyed answering this kind of lecture. "Did you throw the young men away, aunt?"

"Yes I did—in a manner. They were, all three of them, as worthy, eligible young men as a maiden need wish to be mated with. But I was a foolish girl, eaten up with vanity, living but in the incense

offered to my charms—and my face had charms, Alice, then, though you may not see much sign of it now."

"You mean you were naughty enough to flirt with stray swains, Aunt Letitia—which did not please the legitimate ones."

"It was so. I lost the first I was engaged to through flirting with the second; he called it 'carrying on,' I remember; and I lost the second through flirting with the third."

"And the third?"

"He gave me up in his turn; saying, as an excuse, he could not marry a young woman who had no 'stability.' So I am what I am—an old maid. And if you do not take warning in time, child, you will grow into the same; you have all the elements of an old maid within you."

"Good gracious, Aunt Letitia! I!"

"You possess a high spirit, a bright, yet careless mind, a gay tongue, a thirst for admiration, and an uncontrollable love of flirting."

Again Alice Kildare laughed; her bright ringing laugh. Easier for her to believe that the sun would never shine again than that she should live and die an old maid.

"It is only a little fun, aunt, that I am having with Mr. Creighton; nothing else."

"In the absence of Charles Hatherley, you have no right to have 'fun' with him, or with anybody else. I don't suppose it *is* much else: you know best, though; a little whispering, a little waltzing, a little *flirting*. But that would be quite enough to estrange some engaged lovers, Alice; and I do not think Mr. Hatherley is a man to be played with."

"Mr. Hatherley is not here to see it," said the saucy girl.

"As you please, young lady; I have said my say," returned Miss Fennet. "The future will prove whether I am a true prophet."

"Talking of prophets, Aunt Letitia, do you know that Susan and I have settled at last to go to Madame Minchanski and have our fortunes read in her globe of mesmerised water? You had better come with us and hear mine."

"I can tell yours without looking into mesmerised water—whatever that may mean. You will be an old maid, child, no matter what the woman may promise you. Mark my prediction."

Mr. Charles Hatherley, a slim, handsome, fair-haired young engineer, who was likely to get on, and had besides some expectations, had fallen deeply in love with Alice Kildare. Alice was in love with him; but her vanity was intense, her thirst for admiration (as her aunt told her) incorrigible. During her lover's absence she thought fit to amuse herself, plunging into a flirtation with half a dozen young fellows at the same time, and telling them no end of white lies as to her reported engagement. She was exceedingly attractive; bright, piquante, and spirited. At this very time when she lay awake

at night thinking of her betrothed, and never went to bed without kissing his photograph, she was flirting lightly with the said young fellows and desperately with Tom Creighton. Creighton was a rich man's son and would be rich himself; he had no profession, consequently could devote his time to the seductions of flirtation. He had grown seriously attached to Alice Kildare, and would have liked to win her from Hatherley. The two young men knew each other well, but before Hatherley went away from Masseter a coolness had arisen between them. It was whispered that Hatherley had detected the other in some underhand dealing that even then had for its base the stealing away the love of Alice. He had warned her the morning he left that she must not trifle with that sneak Creighton—as he called him. Aunt Letitia had no suspicion of this.

Another matter had also occurred more recently that Aunt Letitia had no suspicion of, and it was the worst of all. A few days ago Alice Kildare had allowed Mr. Creighton, in the presence of a mutual friend, to bring a dishonourable charge against her lover; that is, to tell her a slanderous story of him. Alice knew it must be false; yet she sat and listened to it, apparently accepting its truth, without the faintest attempt to fight for Charles Hatherley's good name—and all because she feared that if she did make a fight, young Creighton would suspect she was really engaged to him, in spite of her vows to him that she was not. It is impossible to defend her, mind you; sober-minded, old-fashioned people think such conduct in a young girl simply scandalous, though it is said to be tolerably common in these days.

Susan Sant was another niece of Miss Fennet and cousin to Alice, a good kind of girl, not pretty and not giddy. Susan came to dinner that day, as invited; Alice lived with her aunt. In the afternoon the two girls, tying on their pretty gypsy hats, departed on their visit to Madame Minchanski; who, having announced herself in the newspapers as the "Great Clairvoyante Sibyl," was turning the brains of half Masseter, by professing to see miraculously the shadows of coming events in a globe of mesmerised water—at so much per head.

Miss Fennet was waiting tea when the girls got back; Alice, for a wonder, out of temper. "Well," began their aunt, "what has the Sibyl promised you? A husband a piece and a fortune to match?"

"She is a humbug," said Alice, fretfully; "I am sorry we went. It is very wrong of people to encourage such wicked impostors."

Aunt Letitia smiled. "So it is, my dear; Susan, suppose you tell me about it?"

Susan laughed good-naturedly. "It is silly of Alice to be put out. Because the Sibyl did not say she was to be married, Alice has been calling her an impostor all the way home. I don't say she is not; and I dare say she got some private information about all Masseter before setting up to tell fortunes in it."

"But, my dear, what passed? What did you see and hear?"

"We went into a darkened room, aunt, and when our eyes got

accustomed to the darkness, saw a little, ghostly-looking old woman with a waxen face and great hollow black eyes. She was sitting in a corner on a low seat, and had a glass globe of water before her on a stand. Alice asked her quite boldly what she could do, and why the water was different from other water. The water had been magnetised, she answered in a clear, deep voice, and she, having the gift of supernatural sight, could see in it what ordinary people could not—beautiful pictures, and visions of events to come. Then she took Alice's hand and pressed it on her own forehead, and began to roll her great dark eyes. It was enough to scare one, Aunt Letitia."

"I dare say. Well?"

"By-and-bye she looked into the globe of magnetised water, and I thought she was never going to speak again. Alice asked whether she saw anything in it that concerned her. 'Yes, my child,' she said, 'I see pictures of your future there, like a moving panorama. You have plenty of lovers; but I—I am looking for the picture of a wedding, and I don't see it. Wait a bit.' Alice laughed at that, aunt, and I laughed, and she took just one strange look at us both, and bent over the globe again. 'No, there's no wedding-ring,' she went on; 'I can't see here that there ever will be one. Stay, what is this? I see one dim picture a long way off in the future, and in it you stand up surrounded by people; you are greatly changed; taller, thinner and paler. Is it a wedding?—no, I think not, but it is all too far off, too dim. I go back to the pictures that are nearer and clearer, and—why, what is this?' she broke off. 'Here is a great noise, a disturbance, a crowd. It is an accident, I think—or a fight. Mercy, the water turns red! It is blood. Blood, child, but no wedding.' And the water did take a tinge of red, aunt; that's a strange thing."

"Oh, very," assented Miss Letitia. "Go on, Susan."

"The little old woman got up from her seat and looked at us. 'I cannot tell you anything else to-day,' she said, 'now the water is troubled. If you want to know more, you must come again.' So——"

"Then you did not get your fortune told, Susan, after all!"

"No, aunt."

"Well, my dear, I don't see that it's much loss. I could have told a better fortune to each of you for half the money. But you perceive, Alice, that my own opinion has been endorsed by the magic globe—plenty of lovers for you, but no wedding-ring. That good lady has been laying in a stock of information about you and your misdeeds, my dear."

Alice turned round from the window, where she had been standing. "Do you think so? Do you think that is what she does?"

"Why, of course, child. How else could she ply her trade?"

"Still, I can't see how the globe of water could have suddenly changed to red."

"Cochineal," was the response. At which the girls laughed.

It was the season of peaches and melons. The time when the days are the hottest; when wise Americans seek, though nearly in vain, for cool and shady places, and open-air amusements are in vogue, and devout people hold camp-meetings. Does the English reader know what a camp-meeting is like? Most likely not. Certainly not, unless he has crossed the Atlantic and participated in one.

A camp-meeting had been organised for Masseter. It was held on a plain outside the town. Miss Letitia Fennet attended it with a large party of relatives and friends, old, middle-old, and young, many of them coming from a distance to be present.

The old sat up among the worshippers, close to the preacher's platform; Miss Letitia took her place half-way back in the congregation, like one who was doubtful in her mind whether to separate herself from the world or not; while giddy-pated Alice Kildare did not pretend to sit among the congregation at all, but fell back on the extreme borders, with other young people of her stamp, where the preacher's voice could scarcely be heard at all. For, it must not be thought everybody who goes to a camp-meeting goes for edification: and the position of the three classes mentioned exactly represented the devotional state of these good folk: the devout, the semi-devout, and the non-devout. In point of fact, the young people on the outermost borders of that large assembly were flirting together with all their might. And I don't mind whispering to you, if you are a stranger, that that is what young people mostly go to camp-meetings for. Alice Kildare sat side by side with Tom Creighton; they were flirting away to perfection, regardless of the curious eyes around them; indeed, they had no eyes at all but for each other, and saw none.

"Alice, you should not; do be more cautious: they are staring at you all round," whispered Susan Sant. "You know that Mr. Hatherley is coming home to-morrow."

"When the cat's away the mice will play," retorted Alice, turning her bright, laughing face upon her cousin. "*I* mean to play up to the very last moment of my liberty."

So there she sat upon one of the rude wooden benches under the shady tree, in her cool white muslin dress with its pink ribbon-bows, and the white straw hat shading her pretty face, and allowed Mr. Tom Creighton to whisper soft nonsense to her. Was all this wicked on a Sunday at camp-meeting? Certainly it was not good: but three-fourths of the giddy boys and girls—what better were they?—were behaving in the same wicked manner.

Suddenly Tom Creighton's soft, lazy voice ceased to murmur, and his head went bolt upright, as if surprised or startled. Alice looked up to see why. At a distance, watching them, she saw a vision, and could not keep down a cry. It was that of Charles Hatherley; the slim, handsome, earnest young fellow to whom she was betrothed. She felt dreadfully guilty as he approached, his dark grey eyes fixed with strange expression upon hers. It had been great fun to flirt during his absence, but—dear me!

Mr. Hatherley passed her with a cold bow. Alice then saw that he had his mother on his arm; he was leading her to a seat among the devout people next the preacher's platform. Alice's heart beat queerly and Tom Creighton regarded her keenly. It wasn't pleasant; and Alice hated unpleasant things worse than she hated Aunt Letitia's lectures.

Soon she saw her betrothed coming back alone. He halted before Alice, raising his hat. Creighton had risen then.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Kildare, for entering upon a private matter in this place, but ——"

"It is not quite the place for it," interrupted Alice, trembling a little and thoroughly frightened, especially by his cold voice and distant manner. "To-morrow, perhaps? We are here to listen to the minister."

"But, I may not have another opportunity," he slowly said, continuing his words as though he had not heard her. "I wish to ask you a question in the presence of—of this—individual; and I must beg of you to answer it."

Taking a sheet of paper from his pocket, he unfolded it. "Read that, if you please," he said to Alice, who by this time was conscious of a powerful inclination to run away. The paper contained an exact copy of the slanderous statement repeated to her by Tom Creighton. Her hand, encased in its delicate lavender glove, shook as she held the paper: but she did not speak.

"I only wish to know," said the young man, with simple dignity, "whether you allowed this disgraceful slander to be made to you, and accepted it."

"Accepted it?" she faltered.

"By not contradicting it."

Alice could not answer. She would have given the whole world to run away; but she could not do it. She could not have moved from the gaze of that wrathful, stern grey eye, and from half a score more eyes, wonderingly fixed upon her like a siege of guns.

"A very short answer is sufficient. Yes, or no, Miss Kildare?"

"I will not answer," retorted Alice, driven to desperate bay, and striving to find escape and refuge in playful insolence. "You cannot make me; you cannot *make* me do anything, you know."

"I beg your pardon," he replied, with icy politeness. "I would not for the world ask you to do aught that is disagreeable to you. Allow me to wish you good day, Miss Kildare."

Alice did not like his looks as he turned away to face Tom Creighton. Perhaps the latter did not like them either.

"Will *you* come with me to give the explanation which she has refused?" he haughtily said. "I demand it of you—unless you are too much of a sneak and a coward."

Alice Kildare shook in her shoes as they strode away together, the tall, slender, handsome, and traduced man a little in advance, and

disappeared beyond the encircling grove of trees. A short while, but two or three minutes, as it appeared to the terrified girl, and there came the sound of a pistol shot. Of *two* shots, as it seemed, fired simultaneously. The outer benches were deserted as if by magic; everybody ran in the direction, abandoning for a time the eloquent words of the preacher, to which they were pretending to listen.

There had been a sort of duel—after a sharp, short quarrel. Tom Creighton had made but a lame defence, and the other struck him. Neither of the young men had a pistol; but sundry loafers, congregating outside the camp-meeting, just as they congregate outside any other large meeting, had. Loaded, too. Creighton, raging under the blow, called out for satisfaction—for a fair fight—a duel. Half a dozen pistols were at once at their command, and the combatants stood up to shoot at one another. Creighton fell, and lay in a pool of blood; Mr. Hatherley did not fall, but blood was dripping from his arm.

Safely sheltered within the crowded assemblage, placidly drinking in the exhortations from the platform, Miss Letitia Fennet was ignorant of all this. When the meeting broke up for the dinner recess, she became all too conscious of it, for the camp was then ringing with the news from one end to the other. It pretty nearly scared away Miss Letitia's wits; she all but fainted under the scandal. There had been a fight with pistols, between the young men, Hatherley and Creighton, friends hitherto: the former was wounded in the arm, the latter was dead; and it was Alice Kildare who had caused it all. And for it to have taken place at a religious meeting!—and on a Sunday! "Oh, the pity of it! Oh, the scandal! I shall never hold up my head before the world again," groaned poor Miss Letitia.

The camp police had soon come upon the scene, and they arrested Charles Hatherley in the name of the offended majesty of the law. It was not of any use to arrest a dead man, so Creighton was carried to his home. A wicked newspaper said next day that the fighters had a larger and more enthusiastic audience than the minister.

But when it was discovered upon Tom Creighton's arrival at home that he was not dead, only desperately wounded, and that the duel itself had been fair enough, Hatherley was released. In spite of his damaged arm, he managed to pen a note to naughty Alice Kildare, who had led to all the trouble.

"I return you our plighted troth. It is worth nothing to me now, and I know it has for some time been worth nothing to you. I also know now that women are incapable of steady truth and faithfulness. I suppose God made them so. But I cannot see why it was ordained that a man may pour out his soul, all the pride of his manhood, all his earthly hopes at a woman's feet, and for compensation get only the satisfaction of awaking to the bitter fact that he is a fool. I leave Masseter for good, never to return to it, and you will not see me again. But I hope you will always be happy."

This letter reached her on the Sunday evening. "Always be happy!" she repeated in cruel mockery. "Never a day's happiness will be mine again in this world. Oh, if I could but recall the past! I wonder whether God will forgive me in time?"

Alice took the letter to bed with her, and cried over it all night long; over her lost true lover; worst of all, over Tom Creighton. She was his murderer, nothing less, she knew that; and she would have laid down her own life willingly, to recall his.

"So you were right, Aunt Letitia," she quietly said to her aunt, when they met at breakfast in the morning. "I am to be an old maid for all time."

"You seem to be calm enough—considering what has happened," was Miss Fennet's reproachful comment.

"Aunt—aunt—but for forcing myself to this unnatural calmness, I should break out in a storm of hysterics and perhaps frighten you," breathed poor Alice, pressing her hand upon her chest to still its panting. "It is all bad, very bad, at the best; but I could have borne it better but for Thomas Creighton's death."

"Thomas Creighton's not dead," said Miss Letitia. "I heard that news this morning. Desperately injured, but not dead."

A sob of thankfulness leaped from her heart up on high. "Is there any chance that he will be saved, aunt?"

"I don't know. I dare say nobody does know. The injury is inward—and very bad, and he is in great danger."

"Well—well—however it may be, I must bear it. And I shall be an old maid to my life's end; as you foretold, Aunt Letitia."

Aunt Letitia drew in her lips in grim dissent. "Not if you can help it. I am sure of that."

"It is I who shall help it, aunt—though I do not suppose anybody would ask me now. Charles Hatherley has given me up; he could not do less; and I shall *never* marry any one else. Aunt"—in a passionate outburst—"do you think I am made of wood or stone, that I should not feel this dreadful thing? Do you think I am all bad—that I have no shame—no remorse? It is a life's lesson to me."

"It will be a life's shame to *me*," assented Miss Letitia.

"It is very odd, though, come to think of it," dreamily remarked Alice, "that the woman with the globe should persist there would be no wedding-ring for me, and that she saw blood in the water!"

Mr. Thomas Creighton got well with time. He married his cousin, Fanny, a pretty girl and a nice girl, who had been staying with the Creightons when the catastrophe happened, and remained to help to nurse him. The doctors ordered him to Europe for a lengthened sojourn to complete his cure, and he would not go unless he could carry Fanny with him. So they were married off-hand, and started on their travels—but he took not the slightest notice, good or bad, of Alice Kildare. It was said in Masseter that his feeling against her

was strangely bitter for having falsely led him to believe, in her coquetry, that she was not engaged to Hatherley.

II.

"Oh, botheration!" remarked Charley.

"Charles Hatherley, before truth and justice, I believe you to be the laziest, coolest, most uncivilised old bachelor that ever vegetated in Yankee land! Why, how many years is it since you were at Masseter?"

"Don't care to be at the trouble of counting up, this hot day, Gerty," drawled the gentleman, who was in a rocking chair, his light coat thrown back. "Twelve, I suppose."

"And the rest. I have been here ten summers, and I believe you had been gone oceans of years then. You were raised at Masseter, as the people say, Charlie; and I think I have heard that you left it because of some quarrel with somebody. What was it?"

"Can't remember. Gerty, I wish you'd not bother a fellow. I had to leave it for my engineering work."

"O, that was it, was it! And your mother gave up her home here and settled near you — and now she's dead and gone, poor dear aunt! And you've made a splendid fortune, and are taking a six months' holiday."

"Luck has been with me, Gerty, that's a fact."

"Of course it has: therefore you should be reasonable. I tell you to get into your Sunday-going feathers, my tall cousin, that a little body like me has to look up to if she would see him, and accompany us to the camp-meeting, and not say you don't like them."

"But I don't," repeated he.

"That's a fib, sir, I know. Everybody likes camp-meetings. You need not sit amidst the crowd, Charley; there's plenty of fun outside —and we can hear the preacher if we listen."

"Oh, plenty of fun outside——sometimes," he rejoined.

"Well, please to make yourself ready, sir, for I shall take you. Idleness is the root of all evil, you know. I mean to introduce you to a pretty young widow; she's sure to be there, and it's time you married."

"Spare yourself the trouble, Mrs. Gertrude. I don't like widows."

"But this one's charming. And rich besides—though you don't need that."

Mr. Hatherley laughed a little as he got out of his chair. "What's her name, Gerty?"

"Sophia. She is the widow of old Judge Tamlin, and my husband's niece, and she's not five-and-twenty yet. I'm sure she and you were made for one another. I hope you'll propose to her, Charley, before you leave Masseter."

"I hope her head won't ache till I do," said the engineer, with short gallantry.

"Now, Charles Hatherley, you ought to be ashamed of yourself," flashed the little woman, thoroughly in earnest. "Are you a Hottentot —that you should not marry?—or a Red Indian? All civilised men marry, and are proud to. Why, you'll be forty in a few years!"

"Getting on towards that age now, Gertrude."

"And how on earth you should have reconciled yourself to live to that age and remain a bachelor, passes reasonable comprehension. I shall be ready in ten minutes, Charles."

Thus we gather that Charles Hatherley had prospered and was a bachelor yet. He had come again to Masseter on a short visit for the first time since leaving it, and was the guest of his cousin Gertrude Tamlin and her husband Nathaniel; Nat having settled at Masseter to be near the law courts, where he practised.

Another camp-meeting was being held at Masseter, on the same spot where the last was held fourteen summers ago. The last that we know anything of, you understand: lots of them had been held between. Charles Hatherley made no more ado about escorting his cousin Gertrude, but did it. He could hardly help doing it, for Mr. Tamlin was obliged to be twenty miles away that day. "Nobody will recognise me, I dare say, after all these years—and I don't know that it much matters if they do," he said to himself.

"If it's all the same to you, Gerty, I'd rather we did not sit with the outsiders and the fun, but where we can hear something," he remarked to her as they drew near the camp ground.

"Oh, very well. Perhaps Sophy will be in front too: she's a bit of a dévote."

So they found places amid the serious part of the congregation, and sat still on the wooden benches, and heard the preacher with listening ears. Gerty left her boy and girl on the outskirts, to be taken care of and kept as quiet as might be. Her eyes went roving amid the large assemblage in search of the pretty widow she was recommending to Mr Hatherley; but the widow appeared not to be within view. A little more forward than they were, to the side, sat two ladies of quiet demeanour. One an aged woman with silvery hair and placid face; the other much younger, tall and gentle, with soft dark eyes and an earnest and rather remarkably still face, imparting somehow the idea that a great wave of trouble must have some time passed over it. They caught Charles Hatherley's eye; after gazing at them for a minute or two, his own face became dyed with a burning red, plainly to be seen through all the bronzing of the sun.

Little Mrs. Tamlin, supremely unconscious, presently pointed out these very ladies to him. "Do you see them," she said in a whisper; "those two ladies yonder?—very nice-looking both—the old one is in black silk, the younger in grey muslin. There—to your right."

Mr. Hatherley appeared to look in several directions before finding the right one. "Well?—what of them?" he asked.

"Oh nothing; only that I thought Sophy would probably be sitting

in their company, for old Miss Fennet's a great friend of hers. Indeed, so is Alice Kildare."

"Alice Kildare, did you say?"

"Yes; just look what a nice face is hers. She has a history, that young woman. Years ago, ages before Nat and I came to the place, two young men fought for her, and one was nearly killed. I never heard the particulars; people seem not to care to talk of it; but it was said to be all her fault—that she had played with the two and so set them against each other. Well, she has paid for it, poor thing, by being left to be an old maid."

"She is not married, then!"

"O dear no. She *won't* marry. Other men have asked her to, since then, but she only thanks them meekly, and shakes her head. She is very nice and good, though, Charles; more like an angel than a woman in her care and thought for others.—Oh my! listen! Is not the preacher just now giving it hot to all the sinners!"

When the long sermon was over, the congregation left the wooden benches to themselves, and dispersed in groups outside. Some to gossip, some to seek out country friends, some to take the luncheons they had brought. Gerty Tamlin went looking after her children, and found them in the company of some other children, two little girls, whose mother had once been Susan Sant. All were gathered round old Miss Fennet, who was bending over the little ones from her seat. Alice stood by her aunt, smiling.

"You can see her face now, Charles," said Mrs. Tamlin.

Charles Hatherley looked at it, himself screened behind a tree's thick trunk. The fine delicate face was the least bit faded and tired-looking. It was a clear, true face, fine and pure, and you might read in it, if you were an accurate observer, the traces of past suffering.

Before he knew what anybody was about, himself included, he was being whirled suddenly forward by impulsive little Mrs. Tamlin. "Miss Fennet, do pray allow me to introduce to you my cousin, Charles Hatherley: Mr. Hatherley, Miss Kildare.—He is not quite a stranger to Masseter, for it is his native place, though he has not been to it for many years."

It was Gertrude's custom to let her tongue run on: probably not one of the three distinctly heard the words it said now. Charles Hatherley took his hat off and bowed; Alice glanced at him as she returned the bow, an ineffable look in her dark, softly-fringed eyes.

"Yes," said Miss Fennet, "we knew Mr. Hatherley in the old days. I am glad to see you again," she added, gazing steadily at him. He put out his hand, with hesitation, but she met it cordially. Alice had turned away. After a few words, he turned also. She had halted in a little spot of quivering sunshine, that flickered through the leaves of the trees, and lighted up her grey muslin dress and her white face, which had turned the hue of the grave.

"I fear you were startled, Miss Kildare. I beg your pardon for it; it was not my fault."

"Not exactly startled," she said, with a sweet smile, "surprised more than startled. It is so many years since we met."

"Fourteen years this summer. It is rather singular, is it not, that we should meet at the same spot on which we parted?"

"Yes, I suppose it is. But life holds many curious little ins and outs: we are sure to experience some of them in passing through it."

"Charles! Charles Hatherley!" called out the impatient Gertrude. "Where are you? Do come here! I want you particularly."

"May I shake hands with you?" he said to Alice Kildare, preparing to move away in answer to the call. "Your Aunt Letitia has been good enough to permit me the privilege."

As she held out her hand frankly, her cheeks flushing pink, she looked so like the Alice of the past days, once his best love, that he felt his heart quiver with a very unaccustomed thrill.

The young widow, Sophia Tamlin, had just turned up, and Mr. Hatherley bowed before her. Mrs. Gerty took care to keep them together after that. Miss Fennet was too frail now to stay at a camp-meeting all day, and departed for her home with Alice Kildare.

Sophy Tamlin, who loved society, accepted the invitation to return with Gertrude for the evening. And the evening would have been a grand success, but for one drawback—Charles Hatherley was so mean as to disappear from it.

Aunt Letitia was very glad to be at home. Tired with the day's exertion, she retired to rest with the sun. Alice sat on alone, the glass doors of the room open to the garden in the summer twilight. The moon was rising, her light shone right into the avenue of trees that led from the window. Alice walked down it and took her seat on the bench in its midst, thinking—oh, thinking of the past.

Presently, someone's footsteps were heard approaching from the window, and she turned her eyes. It was Mr. Hatherley; but she could hardly see him through her blinding tears.

"I thought I might venture to call to say good-bye," he said. "I am leaving to-morrow."

"My aunt understood Mrs. Tamlin to say you were going to stay a week," she replied.

"Yes, they wish me to, but—but I think I must leave."

In spite of her stately look, he saw that her face was sadly sorrowful. "You are not greatly changed," he observed, "in all these years."

"Oh but I am, indeed I am. Changed in all ways: in looks, in thoughts, and in heart."

"It was in looks, I meant. Alice," he impulsively went on, sitting down beside her, "will you answer me a question—why have you not married?"

"Was it right that I should marry?" she rejoined in a shrinking tone. "After all that passed."

"I don't see why not. Creighton got all right again; is all right

still. I saw him and shook hands with him last year. And I—well, I cannot think that any recollection of me prevented you."

She, agitated, tried to speak, but the sound died away in a sorrowful, bitter sob, and she covered her face with her hands. He drew them away: he took one of the cold hands into his.

"Alice, I never got over it—the old hurt you gave me; I never got over the old love; it is with me still, and I have remained single for your sake. Will you be my wife now?"

She drew her hand away: she gazed at him wonderingly. "Do you know what you are saying?—what you would ask? I am no longer a young woman to be wooed: I am thirty-four years of age."

"I am older still," he answered, smiling. "Oh my love, you must give me a better excuse than that. I fancy"—as she bent her head down to hide the falling tears—"that you have no better to give. Have you waited for me, Alice?—stayed single for the love of me? My darling, you must let me end it."

"But, Charles"—lifting her head for a moment from the shelter to which he had gathered it—"even if—if that were true, how could I marry you now? What would the world say?"

"Say? 'What constant lovers those two have been, cherishing one another always in their hearts!' that's what the world would say," laughed Mr. Hatherley. "If it said the contrary, 'What old spoonies those two are,' I don't suppose either of us would care much."

She took from some receptacle a small note-case and produced a slip of paper creased and yellow with age. She held it towards him.

"Charles Hatherley, you told me in this note that a woman was incapable of truth, of faithfulness. Will you take the words back?" she said softly. "Will you take it *all* back?"

For answer he tore the paper into shreds and fragments and scattered them away amid the trees of the avenue.

"So please heaven, my hand shall so scatter all that gives you pain or trouble, Alice, so long as we both shall live. God bless you, my wife! May He bless us all!"

"Shall you go away to-morrow now?" she whispered, breaking the silence.

"Now I shall stay as long as ever they will have me."

Little Mrs. Gerty, ardent in the cause of Sophy Tamlin, resented the news warmly. But when matters came to be explained to her she dashed right over to the enemy.

"It is quite a romance," she cried with enthusiasm. "After all, there's no love like one's first love. *Quite* a romance."

E. A. C.

TOO LATE.

A MAIDEN stood in a castle tower,
(Oh, and her face was fair to see!)
She stood in the light of the sunset hour,
And she looked afar over field and plain,
And she said, "If he never comes back again,
There are other knights as good as he!"

Laughed, "other knights are as good as he,"
And yet she gazed as the sun went down,
And the mists came creeping up over the lea,
And the night-breeze rustled and whirred on high,
The sun shut his doors in the stony sky,
And left the meadows all dull and brown.

The maiden stood in the castle tower,
The sun came out of the sky again,
And some knights came singing outside her bower,
But the maid was gazing afar—afar,
As one might watch for a vanished star,
And watching gives such a look of pain!

And the days wore on, as all days must wear,
The girl looked pale when the sun grew strong,
And the knights outside still stood singing there,
But she did not smile and she did not heed,
She did not hear them at all indeed,
Or heard but to wish they would cease their song!

And then the sunlight grew faint again,
A weary page to the gate drew nigh,
He had brought her a scarf with a crimson stain,
And a message from one who was slain that morn:
"My darling, 'twas true what you said in scorn,
There's many a worthier knight than I."

Then the maiden turned from the castle tower
(The mists came creeping across the lea),
And the knights rode off in the twilight hour,
And out from the castle they heard a cry:
"I gave him a scoff for my last good-bye!
And there's no knight living so good as he!"

ISABELLA F. MAYO.

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